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Seismic tests bad for business

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Alice Morrissey, left, a Sullivan's Island resident and founder of Don't Drill Lowcountry, participating in Hands Across the Sand on Folly Beach on May 21. The annual event was a showing of opposition to seismic testing this year. (MOULTRIE NEWS PHOTO)

Often business interests and environmentalists are at loggerheads: Development versus conservation.

But the two have found common ground on a worthy issue affecting the Atlantic Coast. They oppose seismic testing for offshore oil.

Of course, Big Oil is an exception. It wants to test for oil deposits in case the federal government changes plans and permits drilling offshore.

But business owners and organizations from New Jersey to Georgia have stepped up to oppose testing because, despite what the oil companies promise, they know the damage such testing can do to marine life.

And why would companies want to test for oil or gas if they weren't hoping to drill for it?

The newly formed Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast (BAPAC) recognizes that the practice of seismic testing can prove unhealthy to fish, whales, dolphins and sea turtles. And they recognize that jeopardizing those resources could jeopardize businesses like tourism and commercial fishing.

Further, drilling poses the very real danger of black crude oil spills gumming up the beaches and stretches of marsh that feed tourism. Then there are the exceedingly ugly industrial complexes needed on shore to support the drilling.

That's not what tourists come to see. And it's not why people decide to move to the coast, buy real estate, pay taxes and shop.

Indeed, the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce organized a meeting last week in North Myrtle Beach for business executives to talk about BAPAC's goals — the No. 1 being to prevent seismic testing.

Frank Knapp, chamber president and CEO, called it “the destructive demon seed that grows up into the deservedly feared offshore drilling.”

BAPAC says that nearly 1.4 million jobs and more than \$95 billion in gross domestic product along the Atlantic coast rely on a healthy ocean ecosystem.

Tim O'Brien of the International Game Fish Association said it would “deplete our valuable resource with far-reaching, negative economic impacts.”

Karen Brown, president and CEO of the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, said it “must be stopped.”

Matt Gamble of Nature Adventures Outfitters in Mount Pleasant said his customers expect to see “healthy and plentiful marine life.”

Then there are restaurants, hotels, real estate sales and rentals, and retail outlets that all stand to suffer from oil testing or drilling.

BAPAC expects to gather the signatures of owners of many, varied businesses that want to stop seismic testing. Those will be shared with Department of Interior officials, members of Congress and the White House.

Some will sign to protect marine life. Some will sign to protect beaches. And some will sign to protect businesses.

All will be doing their best to ward off an environmental, economic disaster before it begins.

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