

## Coastal Stakeholders Oppose Oil Development in the Atlantic

Last year, the Obama Administration proposed opening large swaths of the Atlantic Ocean to industrial offshore drilling. This proposal for oil and gas leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), covering the 2017-2022 period, would have allowed oil and gas lease sales in a large area off the coasts of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. In the face of intense opposition from coastal communities, fishing interests, the Department of Defense, and NASA, in March 2016 the Administration removed the Atlantic lease sale from the 2017-2022 plan.

However, offshore drilling supporters in Congress continue to push legislation to require drilling in the Atlantic. Furthermore, the federal government continues to review applications for companies to use seismic airguns to search for oil and gas deposits deep below the ocean floor in an area twice the size of California, stretching from Delaware to Florida.<sup>1</sup>

**These proposals for seismic airgun blasting and drilling ignore mounting East Coast opposition, past disasters, and threats to economies and marine life—putting the entire Atlantic coast from Maine to Florida at risk, all for less than 4 percent of the nation’s total oil and natural gas reserves.** Even if *all* of the economically recoverable resources off the East Coast were exploited, the oil would last for less than five months and the gas would last less than 10 months at current national consumption rates.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

**Offshore drilling could destroy the very fabric of coastal communities, state and local economies, and critical marine habitats for decades to come, while also contributing to global climate change.**

### Threats to the economy and coastal way of life:

- Along the Atlantic coast, nearly **1.4 million jobs and over \$95 billion in gross domestic product** rely on healthy ocean ecosystems, mainly through fishing, tourism and recreation.<sup>5</sup> This far outweighs any potential jobs or economic gains that could ever be provided from offshore drilling.
- Offshore drilling in the Atlantic would produce a coast scattered with oil and gas rigs, and would cause heavy industrialization in coastal communities. As seen in the May 2015 Santa Barbara oil spill, all activities related to offshore drilling pose serious threats to our coastline.

**“It is hard to recall a grassroots effort that has advanced a cause so rapidly.”<sup>6</sup>**  
- **Post & Courier, SC**

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. (Mar. 7, 2014). Atlantic OCS Proposed Geological and Geophysical Activities, Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Planning Areas, Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. Retrieved from <http://www.boem.gov/BOEM-2014-001-v1/>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. (Apr. 2014). Assessment of Undiscovered Technically Recoverable Oil and Gas Resources of the Nation’s Outer Continental Shelf, 2011 (Atlantic OCS Updated 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.boem.gov/2011-National-Assessment-Map-ATL-with-BTU-Equiv/>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, United States Geological Survey. (Mar. 2014). Total Mean Undiscovered Gas Resources (Undiscovered Technically Recoverable Resources). Retrieved from [http://certmapper.cr.usgs.gov/data/noga00/natl/graphic/2013/total\\_mean\\_gas\\_2013.pdf](http://certmapper.cr.usgs.gov/data/noga00/natl/graphic/2013/total_mean_gas_2013.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, United States Geological Survey. (2013, March). Total Undiscovered Mean Oil Resources (Undiscovered Technically Recoverable Resources). Retrieved from [http://certmapper.cr.usgs.gov/data/noga00/natl/graphic/2013/total\\_oil\\_mean\\_2013.pdf](http://certmapper.cr.usgs.gov/data/noga00/natl/graphic/2013/total_oil_mean_2013.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office for Coastal Management. (2014). Living Resources. Economics: National Ocean Watch (ENOW). Retrieved from <http://www.coast.noaa.gov/enowexplorer/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Yet another ‘no’ to offshore drilling”, The Post and Courier, August 12, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20150812/PC1002/150819821/1506/yes-another-x2018-no-x2019-to-offshore-drilling>.



## East Coast Opposition

[As of March 2016](#), more than **110 East Coast municipalities** have formally opposed offshore drilling and/or seismic airgun blasting. In addition, over **850 federal, state, and local elected officials**; roughly **1,100 business interests**; and more than **160 conservation and animal welfare organizations** have publicly opposed offshore oil exploration and/or development.

- Fishery organizations in opposition include the [South Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#), the [Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#), the [Southeastern Fisheries Association](#), the [Billfish Foundation](#), and the [International Game Fish Association](#).

So far, **103 unique editorials and numerous business associations oppose East Coast drilling.**

- These groups include the [Outer Banks](#), [Tampa Bay Beaches](#), [Ocean City](#) and [Cape May](#) Chambers of Commerce, the [South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce](#), the [Dare County Tourism Board](#), the [Outer Banks Homebuilders Association](#) and [Association of Realtors](#), the statewide [Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association](#), and the Virginia Beach [Restaurant Association](#), [Resort Advisory Commission](#) and [Hotel Association](#).

## The dangers to human health and the environment:

- In just four years following the Gulf spill (2011-2014), the federal government reported that offshore drilling accounted for a total of 1,063 injuries, 477 fires and explosions, 22 well control losses, 11 spills of over 2,100 gallons of oil, and 11 fatalities.<sup>7</sup>
- Even offshore oil and gas *exploration* is dangerous. Based on the government's own estimates, seismic airgun blasting in the Atlantic could harm fish populations, injure as many as 138,000 marine mammals like whales and dolphins, and disturb the vital activities of millions more.<sup>8</sup>
- **Even exploration requires drilling.** Once the harmful seismic blasting process is completed, companies must drill exploration wells to definitively confirm the existence of subsea oil and gas deposits. Many of these wells come up dry.
- Since the 2010 BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster, Congress has not passed any new laws to reduce the risk of another spill in our waters or on our beaches.

## Seismic airgun blasting's impacts on marine life:

- Seismic airgun blasting is a process which the oil and gas industry uses to identify and map oil and gas deposits under the seafloor.
- Seismic airgun sounds can be heard up to 2,500 miles from the source under some propagation conditions, farther than the distance from Washington, D.C. to Las Vegas.<sup>9</sup>
- **Scientific research shows that noise from seismic airgun blasting can impact fish, whales, invertebrates, and sea turtles, changing behaviors that are necessary for survival.**<sup>10, 11, 12, 13, 14</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, "Incident Statistics and Summaries, available at <http://www.bsee.gov/Inspection-and-Enforcement/Accidents-and-Incidents/Listing-and-Status-of-Accident-Investigations/>.

<sup>8</sup>BOEM. (2012). Atlantic OCS Proposed Geological and Geophysical Activities Mid and South Atlantic Planning Areas Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (DPEIS). Retrieved from <http://www.boem.gov/BOEM-Newsroom/Library/Publications/2012/BOEM-2012-005-vol1-pdf.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup>Nieukirk, S. L., Mellinger, D. K., Moore, S. E., Klinck, K., Dziak, R. P., & Goslin, J. (2012). Sounds from airguns and fins whales recorded in the mid-Atlantic Ocean, 1999-2009. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 131(2), 1102-1112.

<sup>10</sup>Slotte, A., Hansen, K., Dalen, J., & Ona, E. (2004). Acoustic mapping of pelagic fish distribution and abundance in relation to a seismic shooting area off the Norwegian west coast. *Fisheries Research*, 67(2), 143-150. doi: 10.1016/j.fishres.2003.09.046

<sup>11</sup>Blackwell, S. Nations, C., McDonald, T., Greene, Jr, C., Thode, A., Guerra, M. & Macrander, A. (2013). Effects of airgun sounds on bowhead whale calling rates in the Alaskan Beaufort Sea. *Marine Mammal Science*, 29(4).

<sup>12</sup>Miller, P., et al. "Using at-Sea Experiments to Study the Effects of Airguns on the Foraging Behavior of Sperm Whales in the Gulf of Mexico." *Deep-Sea Research Part I-Oceanographic Research Papers* 56, no. 7 (Jul 2009): 1168-81.

<sup>13</sup>Aguilar de Soto, N., Delorme, N., Atkins, J., Howard, S., Williams, J. and Johnson, M. 2013. Anthropogenic noise causes body malformations and delays development in marine larvae. *Scientific Reports* 3: 283 DOI:10.1038/srep02831.

<sup>14</sup>McCauley, R., Fewtrell, J., Duncan, A., Jenner, C., Jenner, M., Penrose, J., Prince, R., Adhitya, A., Murdoch, J., & McCabe, K. (2000). Marine seismic surveys: Analysis of airgun signals; and effects of air gun exposure on humpback whales, sea turtles,