

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 9, 2017

Donna Wieting
Director
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Wieting:

We write in regards to the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) proposal to issue Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) permits to five companies to conduct geologic and geophysical activities (i.e. seismic testing) in the Atlantic Ocean. We are deeply concerned about the prospect of seismic testing being conducted within the Atlantic, and the damage such testing could cause to our coastal communities, both environmentally and economically.

As you know, the companies NMFS proposes to grant IHA permits to are currently seeking permits from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to conduct seismic testing in the Atlantic Ocean. BOEM cannot issue these permits unless NMFS approves these IHA applications. When BOEM rejected applications by these same companies to conduct the same activity in January 2017, it cited the potential for seismic testing to have significant impacts on marine life.

Seismic testing involves using large, seismic airguns, towed behind ships, to fire loud blasts of air at the ocean floor. The soundwaves produced by these blasts are reflected back to the surface, and measured to determine whether oil, gas, or other minerals are present under the ocean. These blasts can be repeated every 10 seconds.

If the applications are approved by both NMFS and BOEM, these companies would be allowed to conduct widespread seismic testing in areas inhabited by both commercially important fisheries and endangered species. Seismic testing can disrupt migratory patterns, cause marine wildlife to abandon important habitats, and disrupt mating and feeding. The soundwave blasts can also destroy fish eggs and larvae. These tests can also cause deafness in whales and dolphins, both of which rely on hearing to reproduce, locate food, and communicate.

The potential damage to marine life is deeply concerning to coastal communities in New Jersey. Tourism and fishing are important economic drivers for the Jersey Shore, and seismic testing in regions of the Mid- and South Atlantic Planning Areas could hurt fisheries and other marine wildlife, threatening New Jersey's economic health.

Concerns about seismic testing in the Atlantic extend beyond New Jersey. Currently, 125 East Coast municipalities, over 1,200 elected officials, and an alliance representing over 41,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families have come out as publicly opposed to seismic airgun blasting and/or offshore drilling in the Atlantic.


NMFS should reject these IHA applications. Doing so would protect the Atlantic Ocean and the communities that rely on its health.

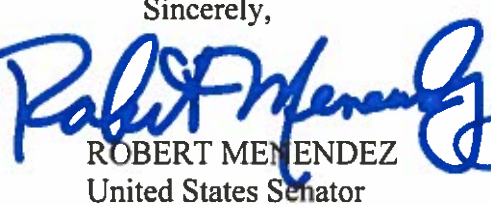
We respectfully request that NMFS and BOEM implement the following measures to ensure that the public is given ample opportunities to weigh in on the proposed IHA and seismic applications:

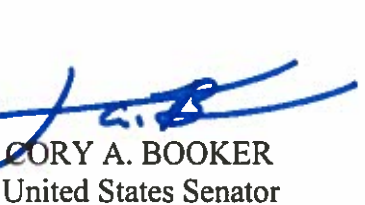
- Publish a Federal Register notice with a comment period for each seismic permit or proposed incidental take authorization;
- Establish consecutive comment periods lasting a minimum of 60 days for each seismic permit or proposed incidental take authorization;
- Release all technical information needed to review the seismic permit and incidental take authorization applications to allow commenters to fully evaluate the applications and make informed comments (e.g., the scientific information relied upon, energy sources, maps of seismic vessels' transects, dates of seismic testing, number of chase and alternative vessels, etc.); and
- Hold public hearings in coastal states, from New Jersey to Florida, especially in communities that would bear the brunt of the burden of any offshore oil and gas activities.

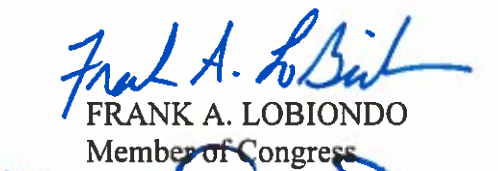
Coastal communities should have an opportunity to weight in about these pending permits. Environmental groups should have an official forum to present their research into the harmful effects of seismic testing can have on marine mammals, fish, and other wildlife. Having a place for these, and other, important stakeholders to present their objections is important to ensuring a fair and transparent process.


Sincerely,



FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress



ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator



CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senator


FRANK A. LOBIONDO
Member of Congress



DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.
Member of Congress


BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress


DONALD NORCROSS
Member of Congress



ALBIO SIRES
Member of Congress




CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress



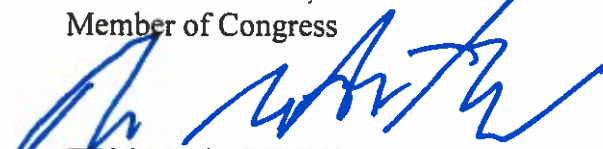
RODNEY P. FRELINGHUYSEN
Member of Congress



JOSH GOTTHEIMER
Member of Congress



BILL PASCRELL, JR.
Member of Congress



TOM MACARTHUR
Member of Congress



LEONARD LANCE
Member of Congress

cc: Dr. Walter Cruickshank, Acting Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management