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The U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is currently in the process of trying to open the Atlantic Ocean to seismic airgun blasting to search for offshore oil and gas.

Seismic air-guns fire intense blasts of compressed air, one of the loudest manmade sounds in the ocean at 200-230 decibels, every 10 seconds, 24 hours a day for week to months on end that could prove harmful or injure and kill dolphins, whales, endangered sea turtles, fish, and other marine life.

As ocean stakeholders, fishermen are uniquely reliant upon and knowledgeable about healthy ocean ecosystems. Commercial and recreational fishermen recognize the serious risks posed by seismic testing and offshore drilling. For example, there is evidence that seismic airguns can dramatically decrease catch rates of commercial fish species by about 50 percent on average over thousands of square miles, with even greater reductions in areas close to the airguns.

According to over 75 leading scientists in a letter sent to President Obama just last year, "Opening the U.S. east coast to seismic airgun exploration poses an unacceptable risk of serious harm to marine life at the species and population levels, the full extent of which will not be understood until long after the harm occurs." Numerous scientific studies show reduction of catch rates in commercially valuable fish, stress responses in crabs, and habitat abandonment by whales after seismic airgun testing. It would be irresponsible to allow surveys in Florida's waters and thus consciously put our fisheries and marine ecosystems at risk.

Florida Governor Rick Scott's Department of Environmental Protection sent a letter to BOEM stating, "Florida is concerned about the effects of G&G activities [seismic airgun blasting] on its marine and coastal resources including sea turtles, marine mammals (including the North Atlantic Right Whale) and fishery resources and their habitats located in these areas. Much of Florida's economy is dependent on these healthy and sustainable marine and coastal resources".

Offshore oil and gas exploration activities pose threats to treasured vacation destinations on Florida's Coasts, which are of intrinsic economic value for numerous industries, serve as essential nursery habitats for recreational and commercially important fisheries.

Seismic airgun blasting for oil and gas exploration in the Atlantic Ocean will put Florida's environment, beaches, marine resources, fisheries and local economies at risk; therefore the Southern Shrimp Alliance expresses its opposition to these activities and urges the administration to stop this exploration process and ensure the vitality of vulnerable local economies on Florida's coast.

Signed:  Date: June 24, 2016

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