

TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

One Town Center Court, Hilton Head Island, S.C. 29928

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David Bennett
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Mayor ProTem

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Wm. Lee Edwards
Marc A. Grant
Thomas W. Lennox
Kim W. Likins
John J. McCann

Stephen G. Riley
Town Manager

91 7108 2133 3936 6004 7915

VIA CERTIFIED MAIL - RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

March 25, 2015

Mr. Geoffrey L. Wikel, Acting Chief, Division of Environmental Assessment
Office of Environmental Program, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (HM 3107)
381 Elden Street
Herndon, VA 20170-4817

Re: Offshore Drilling Activities/Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS)
"Scoping Comments for the 2017-2022 Proposed Oil and Gas Leasing Program
PEIS"

Dear Mr. Wikel:

The Town of Hilton Head Island has developed into a nationally and internationally known premier resort and retirement community. The Island appeals to retirees, visitors, and permanent residents due to its favorable climate, environmental attractiveness, and sensitivity to environmental preservation. As we understand, the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is currently in the process of trying to open the mid-Atlantic Ocean to exploration and development of offshore oil and gas including risky methods, such as seismic blasting. The Town is concerned about the potential impacts of seismic testing and offshore drilling to marine and aquatic life in the Atlantic Ocean as we believe the full impacts are not yet fully understood by scientists, the oil and gas industry, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management or the Federal Government.

In addition, the Town is concerned about the potential risk of spill that the exploratory and commercial drilling, extraction, and transportation of offshore oil and gas resources pose to our coastal region. Offshore drilling activities pose threats for coastal wetland areas of Hilton Head Island, which are of intrinsic ecological value for numerous migratory bird species, serve as essential nursery habitats for recreational and commercially important fisheries, and act as natural buffers from storm surge and hurricanes. The Town of Hilton Head Island is an Atlantic coastal community that relies heavily on tourism, which contributes an estimated \$1.5 billion into the Hilton Head Island area economy annually. As evidenced by the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon disaster, a major oil spill can impact thousands of miles of coastline, devastate local economies like Hilton Head Island and wreak havoc on the marine and coastal environment. Therefore, any drilling allowed on the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf represents a threat to the South Carolina coast.

Mr. Geoffrey L. Wikel, Acting Chief, Division of Environmental Assessment
March 25, 2015
Page Two

The Town of Hilton Head Island Town Council opposes seismic testing and offshore oil and gas development off the South Carolina coast. We believe more research should be conducted to fully understand and to better address the impacts of seismic testing and the options for mitigating those impacts before exploration begins. Let's all work together to fully address the long-term energy needs of our country, which the exploration and development of oil and natural gas off the mid-Atlantic coast will not effectively accomplish and has the potential to do significant harm both ecologically and economically.

Sincerely,

TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND



David Bennett, Mayor

CC: Town Council
Stephen G. Riley, ICMA-CM, Town Manager
Beaufort County Legislative Delegation Members
Billy Keyserling, Mayor, City of Beaufort
Lisa Sulka, Mayor, Town of Bluffton
Samuel E. Murray, Mayor, Town of Port Royal
Stu Rodman, Beaufort County Council Member
Lindsey Graham, U.S. Senator
Tim Scott, U.S. Senator
Mark Sanford, U.S. House of Representatives