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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4604

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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS (RANKING MEMBER)
FEDERAL LANDS
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SEA POWER AND PROJECTION FORCES
READINESS
FRANKING COMMISSION

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

I am writing to submit a formal comment for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM's) public comment period for the proposed 2019-2024 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Last month, I attended BOEM's public meeting in Richmond, Virginia, where I voiced my vehement opposition to offshore drilling and raised my serious reservations about this proposal. I remain concerned, chiefly, with a few significant issues that could impact many of my constituents, along with many other Virginians and Americans who reside near or along our coasts.

The impact of this proposal on local economies is of great concern. In 2016, the tourism industry supported 230,000 jobs in Virginia with a total revenue of \$24 billion.¹ Furthermore, Virginia's Coastal Region's tourism industry in 2015 alone generated \$345 million in state and local taxes—providing much-needed revenue for schools, infrastructure projects, and local government services.² The effects of an oil spill on this industry and the broader economy would be devastating. The Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010 serves as a case study for the upending costs a spill can have. Following the spill, Louisiana leisure visitor spending dropped by \$247 million;³

¹ [Virginia Tourism Corporation, 2016](#)

² [Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2017](#)

³ [The Impact of The BP Oil Spill on Visitor Spending in Louisiana, Revised estimates based on data through 2010 Q4, Tourism Economics, prepared for the Louisiana Office of Tourism, June 2011](#)

hotel cancellation percentages rose 4 weeks after the spill by 44% and 6 weeks after by 60%.⁴ Surrounding states took a hit as well: Texas, Mississippi, and Florida found that 17% of vacationers had postponed or canceled a planned trip.⁵ Were a similar spill to occur along the Atlantic coastline, countless coastal communities would face similar pain.

Commercial and recreational fisheries would also suffer severe setbacks were a spill to occur. Currently, Virginia is the largest seafood producer on the East Coast and the third largest in the United States. In 2014, Virginia fisheries hauled in 388 million pounds of seafood with reported sales over \$1.2 billion; moreover, Virginia fisheries alone support over 17,000 employees.⁶ Similar to the tourism industry, Gulf fisheries' experiences following the 2010 BP spill show how the potential dangers Virginia's fisheries face. A 2012 study estimated the potential impact on fisheries in the Gulf at losses of \$8.7 billion by 2020 with job loss in the region nearing 22,000 jobs in fishery-related sectors.⁷ This was a shocking blow to an industry upon which local economies and communities relied, one that cannot be allowed to be repeated elsewhere.

While the job losses and economic impact due to a spill would affect many Virginians and Americans, the impact would be greatest on coastal communities. It is therefore perplexing that BOEM's only public meeting in Virginia was held 100 or so miles inland, in Richmond.⁸ Residents of coastal communities deserved the opportunity to comment in person, and I am disappointed they did not receive it.

Even without a spill, new leasing off Virginia's coast would compromise military readiness. Naval Station Norfolk, the world's largest naval base, as well as the U.S. Air Force, use the waters off the coast of Virginia for critical open-water training, air-to-surface operations, and live weapons testing and exercises. Two Department of Defense reports—one in 2010⁹ and another in 2015¹⁰—have concluded drilling in the Atlantic would compromise the military's ability to effectively operate and train servicemembers, posing a threat to national security.

⁴[Oceana—Oil Spills and Tourism: They Don't Mix](#), 2016

⁵Ibid.

⁶[NOAA](#), 2014

⁷[Impact of the Deepwater Horizon well blowout on the economics of U.S. Gulf fisheries](#), 2012

⁸[Environmental Impact Statements; Availability, etc.: 2019-2024 Draft Proposed Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program](#), 2018

⁹[Washington Post](#), May 2010

¹⁰[Washington Post](#), March 2016

In a similar vein, the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) has also expressed major reservations over offshore drilling. NASA released a statement in 2015 regarding the Wallops Flight Facility in particular, arguing that “[t]he presence of either temporary or fixed structures at or below the sea surface, within our range’s hazard areas, would have significant detrimental effects on [NASA’s] ability to conduct aerospace test activities.”¹¹

More broadly, this Administration’s move toward expanding drilling indicates an alarming apathy towards climate change. The United States’ reliance on oil and natural gas has greatly increased the amount of greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere, which is driving up global temperatures. In turn, higher global temperatures contribute to a multitude of negatives environmental impacts such as sea level rise—through melting glaciers and thermal expansion of our oceans—leading to increased flooding in coastal communities and habitat loss or degradation. Developing new fossil fuel resources will accelerate these trends.

There have been more than half a million public comments made during this comment period, most in opposition to your plan. Numerous counties and states have vocalized their vehement opposition, as have elected officials at all levels. I sincerely hope you will listen to them all and withdraw this proposal.

Sincerely,



A. Donald McEachin

Member of Congress

¹¹ [NASA Wallops concerned with potential offshore drilling](#), 2016