

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
U.S. Secretary of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240

Dear Madam Secretary,

On behalf of the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast (BAPAC) – which represents over 42,000 businesses working together to protect our communities from new and expanded oil and gas development off the Atlantic coast – thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on our nation’s oil and gas leasing program. Our alliance works to ensure the long-term health and vitality of our Atlantic coast economy through responsible stewardship of our coastal and ocean waters, and we understand that our lives and livelihoods depend on clean, oil-free beaches.

We appreciate the Department of Interior’s efforts to bring in a diverse set of voices at the March 25<sup>th</sup> forum to help inform the upcoming report on the nation’s oil and gas leasing program, but we were disappointed that coastal businesses like ours were not invited to provide testimony. Our businesses are inextricably linked to clean beaches and a healthy ocean. The oil and gas leasing program on the Outer Continental Shelf has a direct impact on the thousands of business owners and hundreds of thousands of jobs that power our thriving coastal economy. We represent a unique perspective and have great expertise on the important role a healthy ocean and clean beaches play in powering a robust clean ocean economy.

Our recreation, tourism, and fishing businesses create well-paying jobs and support a robust coastal economy. Simply put, offshore drilling threatens our businesses. By pausing new oil and gas development on our public lands and waters including those offshore, the Biden-Harris administration has already shown its willingness to take the decisive action necessary to protect our coastal economy. This action will protect jobs and preserve our economies. We are optimistic that the bold action taken to date by the administration to rescue the American economy is a sign of further decisive and necessary action to come, and we look forward to working with the administration to ensure our clean coast economy continues to thrive.

Healthy coasts are also the lifeblood of our economy and the backbone of countless small businesses that depend on ocean tourism for steady revenue. Residents and people from all over the world frequent our coastlines to fish, hike, golf, kayak, surf, wine and dine, and enjoy our beaches.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pendleton, L. and Kildow, J. (2006) The Non-Market Value of Beach Recreation in California. *Shore & Beach* 74: 34-37

According to the latest government data, the clean coast economy on the Atlantic coast supports roughly 1.75 million jobs and nearly \$137 billion in GDP through businesses like hotels, restaurants, charter boats, gas stations, guide businesses, and gear shops.<sup>2</sup> These long-standing industries continue to make our coastal communities vibrant and prosperous today. Properly managed fisheries and well protected beaches can continue to drive economic activity for years to come. The same cannot be said about the finite resources found miles below our waters.

Time and again, the oil and gas industry has failed to protect us from their dangerous practices, and the time to prioritize our communities is now. As too many families and businesses can attest, when you drill, you spill. Communities in the Gulf of Mexico are still dealing with the impacts of the BP drilling disaster from more than a decade ago.<sup>3</sup> The risk of an oil spill off the East Coast would be devastating and it is a risk our economies cannot afford. The pause in leasing to review our oil and gas program is a step in the right direction, but the threat offshore drilling poses to our communities is too great to leave open. It is time to end this practice once and for all by permanently protecting our coasts from new offshore drilling.

The climate crisis is also an economic crisis. Our businesses are facing the impacts of warming oceans, rising seas, and increasingly disastrous weather patterns head on. In just one year, costs incurred from natural disasters *doubled* from the previous year in the United States. In 2020, natural disasters caused \$95 billion in damages.<sup>4</sup> Imagine the level of destruction we will face if this trend continues and damages double again this year, and then again next year and the year after that, and so on. We cannot afford to wait. Permanently protecting federal waters from drilling will prevent over 19 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions — the equivalent of taking every car in the nation off the road for 15 years. And it would prevent over \$720 billion in damages to people, property, and the environment, letting our businesses prosper long into the future.<sup>5</sup> Prohibiting new offshore drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf will help our nation address the climate emergency while protecting coastal communities and millions of jobs.

We are very encouraged that your administration has taken temporary action to protect our coastal economy. But this is not enough. Protections from offshore oil drilling enjoy bipartisan and overwhelming support. Across the political spectrum, voters, businesses, military leaders and elected officials oppose these dirty and dangerous practices. Current opposition includes:

- Over 390 East and West Coast municipalities
- More than 2,300 local, state and federal elected officials
- All the governors along the East and West Coasts — Republicans and Democrats alike

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<sup>2</sup> Oceana (2021) Clean Coast Economy: Technical Methodology.

<sup>3</sup> Oceana (2020) Hindsight 2020: Lessons We Cannot Ignore from the BP Disaster. 1-68p.

<sup>4</sup> Flavelle, C. (Jan. 7, 2021) U.S. Disaster Costs Doubled in 2020, Reflecting Costs of Climate Change. *The New York Times*. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/07/climate/2020-disaster-costs.html>

<sup>5</sup> Oceana (2021) Offshore Drilling Fuels the Climate Crisis and Threatens the Economy. 1-4p.

- Alliances representing over 55,000 businesses

As your administration completes its review of the oil and gas leasing program, we urge you to consider the disastrous economic impact offshore oil drilling and its associated greenhouse gas emissions has on our businesses and communities, and the wide bipartisan support protecting our coast enjoys. We urge you the Biden-Harris administration to end all further oil and gas leasing and prioritize our oceans as a climate solution by investing in clean energy development, like offshore wind when responsibly sited and developed.

By permanently ending new leasing for offshore drilling and investing in clean renewable offshore energy, we can advance ambitious and durable climate action that protects coastal economies, creates jobs, and benefits everyone. For the sake of our climate and the future of our communities, now is the time for action.

Sincerely,

Tom Kies, President

The Business Alliance For Protecting the Atlantic Coast