

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 30, 2013

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding your administration's final Five Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2012-2017 and its proposal for seismic airgun testing in the Atlantic Ocean. We agree with, and appreciate, your administration's decision to not make any areas off the Atlantic coast available for offshore oil and gas leasing at this time. Yet, seismic poses numerous dangers for the Atlantic coast and we oppose this proposed action.

Seismic airgun testing brings the Atlantic coast closer to the risky practice of deepwater drilling, which is the same practice that brought us the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster in the Gulf of Mexico almost three years ago. Even though the seismic airgun testing proposed would span from Delaware down to the middle of Florida, an oil spill the size of the *Deepwater Horizon* would harm sea life, ecosystems, fisheries and coastal economies all along the Atlantic coast from Maine to Florida. The beaches along the Atlantic coast are the principal drivers of tourist economies in most East coast states. Further, many coastal communities are still struggling to recover from the devastating impact of Superstorm Sandy and cannot stand the impact seismic airgun testing and drilling off the Atlantic would have on local communities.

Additionally, the type of seismic airgun testing used to search for oil and gas is incredibly harmful and could injure or kill thousands of marine mammals and fish, including endangered species. Seismic airguns fire intense blasts of compressed air – almost as loud as explosives – every 10-12 seconds, 24 hours a day, for weeks and months on end. These loud airgun blasts can be heard for many hundreds of miles in the ocean and, as a result, can drive whales to abandon their habitats, go silent, and cease foraging over vast areas. At shorter distances, it can cause permanent hearing loss, injury, and even death for whales, dolphins and fish.

According to the Department of the Interior's (DOI) own estimates, the use of airguns would injure up to 138,500 marine mammals and disrupt marine mammal feeding, calving, breeding, and other vital activities more than 13.5 million times. These impacts would include unacceptable levels of injuries and disturbances to critically endangered species, like the North Atlantic right whale, of which there are less than 400 whales left. Furthermore, these may be underestimates because the DOI has used flawed and outdated science which severely understates the acoustic impacts of airguns.

The use of airguns to conduct these seismic tests also threatens fish populations and profitable fisheries. Airgun noise has been shown to decrease fisheries catch rates by 40-80 percent, forcing fishermen to seek compensation for their losses. Additionally, commercial and recreational fishing off the mid- and southeast Atlantic generate \$11.8 billion annually and support 222,000 jobs. DOI's assessment fails to estimate the economic impact to fisheries that could occur from seismic surveys which are vital to the Atlantic coast.

The time and resources that the DOI is allocating to seismic airgun testing could be better used on higher priorities that will allow us to move away from dirty fuels and faster achieve U.S. energy independence. Furthermore, the use of airguns for this proposed seismic testing will result in serious negative impacts on our marine resources that form the foundation of economic vitality for communities all along the Atlantic coast. We urge your administration to stop this process and focus on ensuring the vitality of coastal economies along the Atlantic coast that need it now more than ever. We cannot put our ocean environment, beaches, marine resources, and coastal economies at risk.

Sincerely,

  
FRANK PALLONE, JR.  
Member of Congress

  
JIM MORAN  
Member of Congress

  
JAN SCHAKOWSKY  
Member of Congress

  
RUSH HOLT  
Member of Congress

  
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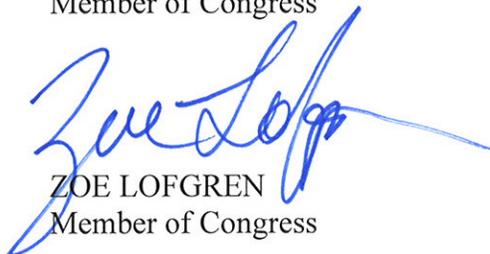
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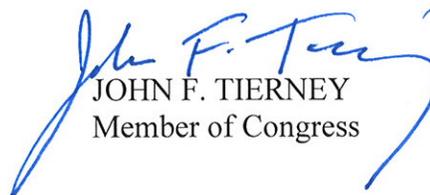
JOE COURTNEY  
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MIKE HONDA  
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BILL PASCRELL  
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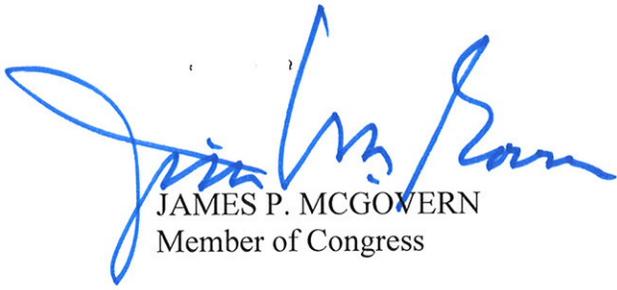
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CHAKA FATTAH  
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ALBIO SIRES  
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Cc: The Honorable Ken Salazar