

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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 concern regarding proposed seismic airgun testing in the Atlantic Ocean, which is part of the Five Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2012-2017. While we support your Administration's decision not to allow lease sales for offshore oil and gas drilling in the Atlantic Ocean, the proposed seismic testing poses a serious threat to our coastal economy, environment, and marine life.

Seismic airgun testing is used to explore for offshore oil and gas resources. Allowing this activity in the Atlantic Ocean is clearly a step towards permitting dangerous offshore drilling. We saw the kind of devastation that this type of drilling can cause to coastal communities when the *Deepwater Horizon* killed 11 people and spilled 4.9 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico nearly three years ago. Even though the proposed seismic testing would only span from Delaware to the middle of Florida, a significant oil spill in the Atlantic Ocean would harm sea life, fisheries, and sea life all along the Atlantic Coast. In particular, it would decimate the region's robust tourism economy, which relies on clean and safe beaches.

In addition to moving the region closer to risky offshore oil drilling, seismic testing could injure or kill thousands of marine mammals and fish, including endangered species. Seismic testing involves firing intense blasts of compressed air—almost as loud as explosives—every 10 to 12 seconds, 24 hours a day, for weeks and months on end. These loud airgun blasts can be heard for 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, seismic testing would injure up to 138,500 marine mammals, and disrupt marine mammal feeding, calving, breeding, and other vital activities. In addition, airgun noise has been shown to decrease fisheries' catch rates by 40 to 80 percent, forcing fishermen to seek compensation for their losses. Since commercial and recreational fishing off the mid- and southeast Atlantic generates \$11.8 billion annually and supports 222,000 jobs, we are concerned that DOI did not take these economic impacts into account when assessing the proposed plan for seismic testing.

Given the decision to prevent dangerous offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean, there is no need to move forward with invasive and harmful seismic airgun testing. We urge a reconsideration of plans to allow this testing, which will only hurt our coastal communities and the marine resources that drive our coastal economy.

Sincerely,


FRANK R. LAUTENBERG


SHELDON WHITEHOUSE

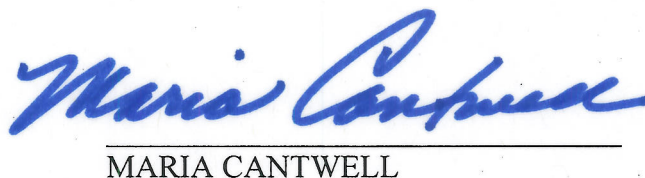

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Cc: The Honorable Ken L. Salazar, Secretary, Department of Interior