

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 31, 2013

Secretary Ken Salazar
Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the President'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. While we agree with, and appreciate, the Administration's decision to not lease any areas off the Atlantic coast for offshore oil and gas drilling at this time, proposed seismic testing, used for oil and gas exploration, could pose numerous dangers for the Atlantic coast. We hope that you will take these dangers in to consideration.

Seismic testing for oil and gas exploration could bring the Atlantic coast closer to the risky practice of deepwater drilling, the same practice that brought about the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. A similar spill off the Atlantic coast would significantly impact the Chesapeake Bay, a commercial and recreational resource for millions of Virginia, which generates significant economic impact in our Commonwealth. It is vital that we protect the Bay, and the Virginia coastline, for future Virginians.

Research has shown that the type of seismic airgun testing used to search for oil and gas could also pose significant harm to marine mammals and fish, including endangered species. According to the Department of Interior's own estimates, the use of airguns would injure up to 138,500 marine mammals, cause nearly 13.5 million disruptions to the feeding, calving, and breeding of dolphins and whales, and interrupt threatened loggerhead sea turtles as they travel to nesting beaches.

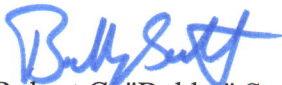
These airgun blasts can be heard for hundreds of miles in the ocean. As a result, whales, fish, dolphins, and other creatures can be forced from their habitats, endure physical injuries, or even death. These impacts would include unacceptable levels of injuries and disturbances to critically endangered species, like the North Atlantic right whale, of which there are less than 400 whales left.

The use of airguns to conduct these seismic tests may also threaten fish populations and profitable fisheries. Commercial and recreational fishing off the mid- and southeast Atlantic

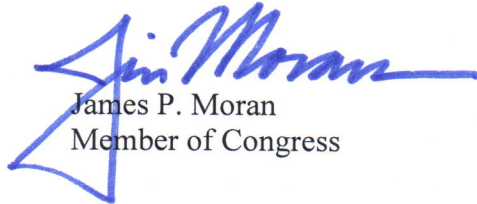
generate \$11.8 billion annually and support nearly 222,000 jobs. It is our hope that in considering the impact of seismic testing of the Atlantic coast DOI will take in to account the possible economic impact on fisheries, which are economically vital to the Atlantic coast.

Given the possible risks inherent in seismic testing, and the fact that it could eventually lead to risky deepwater drilling off Virginia, we urge you to consider the economic and environmental impact that these tests could have on the Atlantic coast.

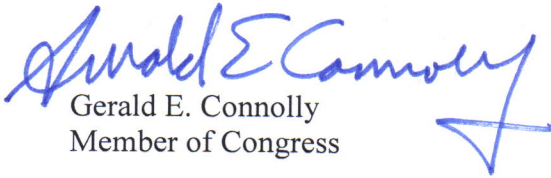
Sincerely,



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



James P. Moran
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress