



MARTIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
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County Administrator

SARAH W. WOODS
County Attorney

July 26, 2017

Ms. Kelly Hammerle
National Program Manager, BOEM
45600 Woodland Road
Mailstop VAM-LD
Sterling, VA 20166

Re: Request for Information and Comments on the Preparation of the
2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing
Program MAA 104000

Dear Ms. Hammerle:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the preparation of the 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program. On behalf of the Martin County Board of County Commissioners, I am writing in strong opposition to any expansion of offshore drilling. Martin County is located on the Treasure Coast of Southeast Florida, immediately north of Palm Beach County, and has a population of just over 153,000. I cannot overstate our concern with the impacts of oil and gas drilling on the ecosystem, tourism industry and economy of our community.

Martin County's economy depends on the health of our waterways and our natural ecosystem. Like many coastal communities, our way of life is tied directly to our waterways. The St. Lucie Federal Navigation Inlet provides a conduit between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian River Lagoon, which is the most biodiverse estuary in North America, as well as a lagoon of national significance. This ecosystem provides habitat for over 4,300 species of plants and animals, including more than 30 threatened or endangered species such as manatee, wood stork, sand hill crane, and peregrine falcon.

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The offshore waters also contain coral reefs, which are at the northern end of the Florida Reef tract. These coral reefs provide vital ecosystem services to a valuable and thriving fishery. The fishery serves as the economic basis for our commercial, sport and recreational fishing industry.

We are extremely concerned about the potential of drilling off the shores of Martin County and across the state of Florida. Despite taking place hundreds of miles away, the Deepwater Horizon disaster impacted Martin County's tourism industry. We cannot support any actions that may bring that danger closer to our shores. The tourism industry is key to Florida. The state welcomed over 112 million visitors in 2016, bringing \$109 billion into the Florida economy.

Our waterways are environmentally sensitive and already faced with significant threats, including impaired water quality from excessive nutrients, extreme freshwater inflows, and invasive species. Surface waters of the northeast Everglades naturally flowed south to the Everglades, west to Lake Okeechobee and east to the Indian River Lagoon. Projects constructed in the 1950's diverted surface waters into canals and into the St. Lucie Estuary and the Indian River Lagoon. As a result, billions of gallons of freshwater are wasted daily to the Atlantic Ocean. During large surface water discharge events, the water quality of the lagoon and surrounding estuary are severely impacted, harming aquatic plants and animals, and requiring restriction for human contact. Martin County is vigilant in our desire to improve our waterways. We have strong environmental regulations and have partnered with the federal and state government as a leader in restoration and conservation. Martin County has acquired over 45,000 acres for various Comprehensive Everglades Restoration (CERP) projects. Since 2000, Martin County has invested over \$50 million in stormwater projects and has restored 28 acres of oyster habitat in the St. Lucie Estuary. Martin County is invested in continued improvements and cannot support any activities that could degrade our natural environment or undermine the federal government's investment in improving our waterways.

The Martin County Board of County Commissioner is opposed to all oil and gas exploration off the Atlantic Coast of Florida. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Doug Smith', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Doug Smith

Chairman

Martin County Board of County Commissioners

cc: Governor Rick Scott