

United States Congress

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 31, 2014

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

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our opposition to your administration's desire to use seismic air guns to search for oil and gas in the Atlantic Ocean, especially off the coast of Maryland. Not only is this proposed action the first major step towards opening the Atlantic Ocean to offshore drilling, but the technology used for this exploration is incredibly harmful to marine mammals and fisheries in the region. We urge you to reject this proposal and refrain from permitting seismic air gun testing off the coast of Maryland.

Seismic air gun testing off the Atlantic coast will lead the way for risky deepwater drilling, the same practice that brought us the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster in the Gulf of Mexico more than four years ago and continues to plague that region. Additionally, the type of seismic air gun 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 air guns fire dynamite-like blasts of compressed air every 10 - 12 seconds, 24 hours a day, for weeks and months at a time. These loud air gun 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 air guns would injure about 138,000 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 only about 455 individuals left. Furthermore, these may be underestimates because the DOI has refused to incorporate into its environmental impact statement new acoustic science being developed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that is 15 years in the making.

Maryland is famous for its blue crabs and is a state that depends on the ocean. 17 of our 24 counties border tidal water, for a total of 4,431 miles. For example, the gross domestic product (GDP) from Maryland's living resources, which includes fishing, hatcheries, aquaculture, seafood processing and seafood markets, is valued at over \$122 million and the GDP from ocean-based tourism and recreation in the state totals nearly \$2.7 billion. Additionally, there are

a total of about 83,000 jobs in the fishing, tourism and recreation sectors in Maryland that are directly dependent on the resources threatened by seismic airguns, and countless others that are indirectly dependent on those resources. Furthermore, Maryland generates millions of dollars in commercial fishing from blue crab, striped bass, menhaden and oysters, which all depend on a healthy ocean for their survival. Simply put, the cost of the proposed action to Marylanders and the marine life off our coasts is far too great to risk for oil and gas exploration that will keep us tethered to the energy sources of the past.

The time and resources that your administration is allocating to seismic air gun testing and expanding offshore drilling could be better used on clean energy technologies, like offshore wind energy, that will allow us to move away from polluting fuels and faster achieve U.S. energy independence. 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. Again, we urge you to reconsider this proposal and, at the very least, refrain from permitting seismic air gun testing off the coast of Maryland.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



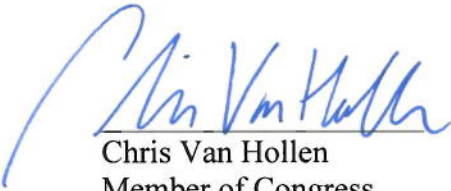
Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator



Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress



John Sarbanes
Member of Congress



Donna Edwards
Member of Congress



John Delaney
Member of Congress