

Editorial Board

6A Brunswick Beacon

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County board should not support risky business

The Brunswick County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution July 6 saying it supports seismic surveying in the Atlantic Ocean to promote future offshore drilling efforts off the coast. But commissioners decided to take another look at the issue after a number of residents voiced their concerns over the decision at the board's July 20 meeting.

During that meeting, Lora Sharkey told commissioners the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will complete a report by the end of the year based on 15 years of studying the impact of seismic blasting. She asked commissioners to hold off on their support of seismic surveys until they read that report.

After she and others spoke, commissioners asked for additional information about the issue to be presented at their Aug. 17 meeting. To us, this indicates commissioners did not do their homework before they passed the resolution July 6.

"Additional information continues to come to this board," commissioner Randy Thompson said during the board's Aug. 17 meeting, before the resolution was reaffirmed by a 2-2 vote. "I would (prefer to take) a neutral stance until the information says it doesn't create a hazard."

We would prefer commissioners listened to the concerns of their constituents before proposing and passing such resolutions.

Commissioner Marty Cooke maintained his support for the resolution Aug. 17, saying, "The people asked us to sit on the board to make decisions, not sit on the fence."

We would like to know exactly who asked him to propose the resolution July 6.

Commissioner Scott Phillips echoed Cooke's sentiments Aug. 17: "We want to be in the game and, if the government is going to come and do something if we show opposition up front, we are not going to be in the game or at the table to protect our resources." Under current federal law, however, there is no guarantee any revenues from oil drilling off North Carolina's coast would come back to the state, let alone Brunswick County.

Remember, no accurate determination of the amount of oil available exists because the last seismic surveys were performed 30 years ago. And the majority of the oil identified in the old surveys is now included in the no-drilling area of the buffer zone.

These are reasons enough to reject the resolution, without taking into account worries over the potential negative impact on marine life and the coastal environment, which together are the backbone of our county's tourism-fueled economy.

Local mayors held a forum on seismic testing and offshore drilling in May 2014. Afterward, several expressed apprehension over pursuing either activity. This month, seven coastal municipalities in North Carolina, including Southport on Aug. 13, passed resolutions opposing both. It appears none of our county's 19 municipalities were consulted before, during or after county commissioners passed the resolution July 6 — a sticking point for commissioner Pat Sykes and for us.

It is profoundly disappointing our county commissioners can unanimously decry a proposed sales tax distribution plan that would decimate our county's economy, yet reaffirm their support of seismic testing and offshore drilling, which not only do not help our county, but also can cause irreversible damage to it on several fronts.

We feel their time would be better spent on action such as formulating a plan to fund beach renourishment, for instance, not resolutions like these that ultimately hold no water.