March 29, 2016

Dear Governors McAuliffe, Hogan, and Markell:

On behalf of watermen and other fishing and seafood stakeholders across Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, we are writing to express our serious concerns with proposed offshore oil and gas exploration and development along the Atlantic coast. We request that you protect our way of life and ensure our industries' futures by opposing these proposals.

As you know, our historic industries, drawing from both the Atlantic coast and the Chesapeake Bay, contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to our region’s economy each year and support thousands of jobs; from charter boat captains and tackle shops, to commercial fishermen, processors, retailers and restaurateurs.

Recreational anglers spent $3.7 billion across the mid-Atlantic in 2011, and commercial fishing brought in $263.5 million in revenue across our three states in 2014. Our industries not only support the mid-Atlantic through these economic benefits, but as institutions that help define our region’s proud culture and history.

Please also consider the following:

- In 2014 in Virginia, shellfish growers sold $55.9 million in oysters and clams, showing an increase of 14% total revenue for clam growers and 33% for oyster growers.
- In 2013, the dockside value of commercial landings of Maryland’s iconic blue crab was nearly $50 million.
- In 2013, saltwater sportfishing in Delaware resulted in $35 million in wages and supported 1,100 jobs.
If offshore oil exploration is permitted in the waters off the Eastern seaboard, it will have significant impacts on our fisheries. Seismic exploration has been shown to negatively impact sea life, from whales and dolphins to bivalves, which is a cause for concern regarding our oyster industry. Allowing seismic blasting could disrupt the spawning, feeding and migration patterns that support our fisheries and replenish fish populations from year to year. In addition to these immediate threats from exploration, leaks and spills across U.S. waters have demonstrated the problems offshore oil & gas development can cause once drilling is underway.

Watermen in the Delmarva region have worked for decades to restore our waterways and recover oyster, crab and finfish fisheries – we cannot let that hard work and sacrifice be lost to risky oil & gas development. Please protect our ocean ecosystems and your constituents who depend on them by opposing seismic exploration and offshore drilling in the Atlantic.

We thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Kayla Bancroft
Christiansburg, Virginia

Connor Fisher
Long Neck, Delaware

Carolyn Baranowski
Millsboro, Delaware

Lee T. Fulmer
Delaware Surf Fishing
Bechtelsville, Pennsylvania

Jack Barnes
Ocean Pines, Maryland

Ed Hill
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