Dear Secretary Ross:

Please accept the attached letter signed by 103 members of the U.S. House of Representatives regarding the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) proposed incidental harassment authorizations (IHAs) for five geological and geophysical companies to incidentally take marine mammals to search for subsea oil and gas deposits in the Atlantic Ocean, as listed in the Federal Register (82 FR 26244).

As laid out in our letter, we have very strong concerns regarding the extensive negative impacts such an authorization would have on Atlantic marine ecosystems and the coastal economies that depend on them. Should you have any questions about our intent or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our offices. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John Rutherford
Member of Congress

[Signature]

Don Beyer
Member of Congress

cc: Chris Oliver, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries
Samuel Rauch, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, NOAA Fisheries
Donna Wieting, Director, Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries
Jonathan Shannon, Outreach Specialist, NOAA Fisheries
Patricia Montanio, Director, Office of Habitat Conservation, NOAA Fisheries
Kate Naughten, Director, Office of Communications and External Affairs, NOAA Fisheries
Jennifer Lukens, Director, Office of Policy, NOAA Fisheries
John K. Bullard, Regional Administrator, Greater Atlantic Region, NOAA Fisheries
Dr. Roy E Crabtree, Regional Administrator, Southeast Region, NOAA Fisheries
Dr. Jonathan Hare, Science and Research Director, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, NOAA Fisheries
Dr. Bonnie Ponwith, Science and Research Director, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, NOAA Fisheries
Keely Hite, Environmental Consultation Branch, Division of Environmental Assessment BOEM
Walter Cruikshank, Acting Director of BOEM
Timothy Williams, Deputy Director of External Affairs, Department of the Interior
June 28, 2017

Secretary Ryan Zinke
Department of Interior
1849 C St NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We are writing in strong opposition to your recent secretarial order (#3350) to move forward with offshore oil and gas exploration in the Atlantic Ocean, and the subsequent issuance of five Incidental Harassment Authorizations (IHAs) by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for Atlantic geophysical & geological (G&G) permit applications.

This decision to move forward with permits for seismic airgun surveys for subsea oil and gas deposits puts at risk the vibrant Atlantic Coast economies dependent on healthy ocean ecosystems, which generate $95 billion in gross domestic product and support nearly 1.4 million jobs each year.

Offshore oil and gas exploration and development, the first step of which is seismic airgun testing, puts at risk coastal economies based on fishing, tourism, and recreation. Numerous studies show the detrimental impacts seismic airgun blasting has on fisheries and marine mammals, thereby affecting the catch anglers bring dockside and the revenue generated by related businesses. A 2014 study conducted off North Carolina’s coast by the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Duke University and NOAA found that, during seismic surveying, the abundance of reef-fish declined by 78 percent during evening hours, a time of day when fish use of that same habitat was highest on the previous three days when seismic surveys were not being conducted. The tertiary effects of this trickle down to fishing businesses, restaurants and the visitors that flock to our coastal communities.

Some proponents of opening drilling in the Atlantic make the argument that seismic airgun surveys for oil and gas deposits would allow local communities to learn more about what resources might be available. The reality is that, by law, the data obtained from seismic surveys are proprietary and only available to the oil and gas industry. The public, local government officials and even Members of Congress would not have access to the survey data. This inability to access information leaves coastal communities without the opportunity to perform substantive cost-benefit analyses for extracting oil and gas reserves off their coasts. Our constituents would be left taking on significant risk without being involved in future development decisions.

We hear from countless business owners, elected officials and residents along our coasts who recognize and reject the risks of offshore oil and gas development. More than 120 local
governments have passed formal resolutions opposing oil and gas exploration and/or drilling in the Atlantic or Eastern Gulf. These include numerous local chambers of commerce, tourism and restaurant associations, commercial and recreational fishing associations, and the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils. More than 41,000 businesses and 500,000 commercial fishing families strongly oppose offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling. Further, NASA, the Department of Defense, and the Florida Defense Support Task Force have also expressed concern with offshore oil and gas development threatening their ability to perform critical activities.

Opening the Atlantic to seismic testing and drilling jeopardizes our coastal businesses, fishing communities, tourism, and our national security. It harms our coastal economies in the near term and opens the door to even greater risks from offshore oil and gas production down the road. Therefore, we implore you not to issue any permits for seismic airgun surveys for subsea oil and gas deposits in the Atlantic Ocean.

Sincerely,

John Rutherford
Member of Congress

Mark Sanford
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress

Michael Capuano
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress
Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Nyea M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Ilana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress

Bill Posey
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

Charlie Crist
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress
Dennis A. Ross  
Member of Congress

Daniel W. Lipinski  
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress

Jerry Huffman  
Member of Congress

Val B. Demings  
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress

Ted Yoho, M.D.  
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

Francis Rooney  
Member of Congress

William Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress

Yvette Clarke  
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress
Mike Doyle  
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress

Peter Welch  
Member of Congress

Paul Tonko  
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

John K. Delaney  
Member of Congress