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

Nyma 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

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress

Bill Posey
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
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Bobby L. Rush
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Niki Tsongas
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Charlie Crist
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Jamie Raskin
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Suzanne Bonamici
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Jackie Speier
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Paul Tonko
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John K. Delaney
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