



## Fishing, Seismic Testing, and Offshore Drilling

The federal government's draft plan for offshore oil and gas leasing for 2017-2022 includes a proposal to drill off a wide swath of the Atlantic coast. Resistance to this proposal is strong and growing: many East Coast communities and constituencies, including fishing industry representatives, have voiced their opposition.

The processes for allowing oil and gas exploration and leasing in the Atlantic Ocean are moving forward in two separate, though related tracks. First, in 2014 the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) issued a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) and Record of Decision to allow geological and geophysical (G&G) activities—including seismic airgun blasting—to move forward in the Atlantic once various additional environmental reviews are completed. Now, BOEM is in the process of developing the plan for offshore oil and gas leasing for 2017-2022.

As ocean stakeholders, fishermen are uniquely reliant upon and knowledgeable about healthy ocean ecosystems. Commercial and recreational fishermen recognize the serious risks posed by seismic testing and offshore drilling. For example, there is evidence that **seismic airguns can dramatically decrease catch rates of commercial fish species by about 50 percent on average over thousands of square miles, with even greater reductions in areas close to the airguns.**<sup>1</sup>

Along with two of the Regional Fishery Management Councils that regulate fishing activities—the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Councils—fishermen have added their voices to the opposition to oil and gas activities in the Atlantic. The two Councils manage many of the fisheries in the proposed area for seismic blasting and oil and gas leasing. They are composed largely of industry representatives.

The following statements from the Fishery Management Councils, fisheries associations, and individual fishermen reflect this opposition and the industry's deep concerns about offshore oil and gas exploration and development.

### Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

- “The Council is committed to the effective stewardship of the marine fisheries and associated habitats in the Mid-Atlantic region. The environmental risks associated with **offshore oil development and operations are not consistent with the Council's vision** for healthy and productive marine ecosystems supporting thriving, sustainable marine fisheries.”<sup>2</sup>
- “After many years of working to rebuild Mid-Atlantic fisheries to sustainable levels, **the potential negative impacts of G&G activities on these rebuilt resources are extremely troubling.**”<sup>3</sup>
- “The Council recognizes the importance of energy exploration to U.S. economic security, but the **[G&G] activities described in the Final PEIS have the potential to contravene the Council's efforts to conserve and manage living marine resources and habitat.**”<sup>4</sup>
- “...given the existing value of marine resources to the region and the nation, from the Council's perspective the **potential benefits do not appear to outweigh the risks of initiating the proposed G&G activities.**”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Engås et al., *Effects of Seismic Shooting on Local Abundance and Catch Rates of Cod (Gadus Morhua) and Haddock (Melanogrammus Aeglefinus)*, 53 Canadian J. Fisheries & Aquatic Sciences 2238–49 (1996).

<sup>2</sup> Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, “[Council Policy on Offshore Oil](#)”, December 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, [Letter to Gary D. Goeke \(BOEM\)](#), May 2, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



## South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

- *Regarding offshore drilling:*
  - “The SAFMC finds...that **oil or gas drilling for exploration or development on or closely associated with EFH [Essential Fish Habitat] ...be prohibited.**”<sup>6</sup>
  - “Certain offshore, nearshore, and riverine habitats are particularly important to the long-term viability of commercial and recreational fisheries under SAFMC management, and potentially threatened by oil, gas, wind and other energy exploration and development activities.”<sup>7</sup>
- *Regarding seismic testing:*
  - “...seismic testing will directly impact benthic ecosystems, essential fish habitat, managed species, and the fisheries which depend on them. **Therefore, the Council recommends that seismic surveys not be conducted in areas that will impact EFH [Essential Fish Habitat]...**”<sup>8</sup>
  - “**Multi-million dollar recreational and commercial fisheries in our region may potentially be affected by seismic testing.**”<sup>9</sup>

## Fishing Associations

**Southeastern Fisheries Association:** “On behalf of the seafood industry represented by our 63 year old fisheries association, we implore you to prevent the seismic testing slated for the east coast of Florida. There is no upside for injuring Right whales and dolphins or putting our white beaches and tourism industry in jeopardy.”<sup>10</sup>

**The Billfish Foundation:** “Before moving further, additional programmatic analysis is needed to reduce the potentially negative impacts [of G&G activities] on important marine ecosystems as well as economically important activities such as recreational fishing.”<sup>11</sup>

**International Game Fish Association:** “The proposed G&G activities will have significant environmental impacts but the PEIS fails to provide specific detail on how it will affect marine mammals, fish and benthic communities...As such, we feel that there is simply too much at risk in going forward with seismic testing.”<sup>12</sup>

**Jim Donofrio, Executive Director, Recreational Fishing Alliance:** “I’m very fearful of anything offshore after [Deepwater Horizon]. The industry proved they can’t cap a deepwater spill and the government can’t help us. I’m anti-offshore drilling.”<sup>13</sup>

**Roy Diehl, Director, Belford Seafood Cooperative; Member, Board of Directors, Garden State Seafood Association:** “If there is any kind of spill [off the South Atlantic] it’ll carry it up here. We’re against it.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, “[Policies for the Protection and Restoration of Essential Fish Habitats from Energy Exploration, Development Transportation and Hydropower Re-Licensing](#)”, June 2005.

<sup>7</sup> South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, “[Policy for the Protection and Restoration of Essential Fish Habitats from Energy Exploration and Development Activities](#)”, December 14, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, [Letter to Gary D. Goeke \(BOEM\)](#), April 30, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The Southeastern Fisheries Association, [Letter to President Obama](#), December 3, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> The Billfish Foundation, [Letter to Gary D. Goeke \(BOEM\)](#), May 7, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> The International Game Fish Association, [Letter to Gary D. Goeke \(BOEM\)](#), May 1, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Radel, Dan, and Nicole Gaudiano. “[Fishermen, Lawmakers Blast Atlantic Coast Drilling Plan](#).” *USA Today*. 29 Jan. 2015. Web. 13 Nov. 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.