



February 29, 2016

Ms. Abigail Ross Hopper
Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

RE: Draft Proposed 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program,
Atlantic OCS Geological and Geophysical (G&G) Activities Involving Use of Seismic Airguns

Dear Director Hopper,

I am writing on behalf of the Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association and we recently voted to oppose offshore drilling and seismic airgun blasting in the Atlantic Ocean. As an association that thrives on the local hospitality industry, we believe the risks to our community and our state are too great to justify offshore oil and gas exploration along Maryland's coast.

We do not support a process that would unnecessarily threaten Maryland's irreplaceable natural resources. Maryland boasts both nationally acclaimed pristine beaches and the unique environment of the Chesapeake Bay. The Assateague Island National Seashore includes more than thirty-seven miles of pristine beaches throughout Maryland and Virginia. Assateague Island State Park was named Top 10 in the nation and the Maryland seashore is a landmark destination regionally, drawing more than 2 million visitors and \$84 million each year. Ocean City alone attracts 8 million guests and tourism brings in over \$1 billion annually along our 10 miles of remarkable shoreline.

Tourism, fishing, and ocean-based recreation, all of which depend on a healthy ocean, are the most important economic drivers in Ocean City and they contribute greatly to Maryland's economy. While Maryland was excluded from the upcoming oil and gas leasing program, our coast remains exposed to the majority of the risks associated with offshore drilling. Neither oil nor water adheres to state borders; a spill off the coast of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, or even Georgia could devastate Maryland's coast and the Chesapeake Bay and do great harm to Ocean City's economy. Additionally, day to day pollution associated with offshore drilling (wastewater, shavings, drilling sludge, and routine leaks and spills) puts enormous strain on coastal ecosystems and the industries that depend on them, and would directly impact Ocean City and surrounding communities.

We are also aware that seismic airgun surveys for the purpose of searching for oil and gas may be conducted off the coast of Maryland. Because Maryland was excluded from BOEM's 2017-2022 Draft Proposed Program for OCS oil and gas leasing, there is no acceptable reason to allow these surveys to proceed off the coast of our state. According to over 75 leading scientists in a letter sent to President Obama just last year, "Opening the U.S. east coast to seismic airgun exploration poses an unacceptable risk of serious harm to marine life at the species and population levels, the full extent of which will not be understood until long after the harm occurs." Numerous scientific studies show reduction of catch rates in commercially valuable fish, stress responses in crabs, and habitat abandonment by whales after seismic airgun testing. It would be irresponsible to allow surveys in Maryland's waters and thus consciously put our fisheries and marine ecosystems at risk.

The Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association adamantly opposes the development of offshore drilling and seismic airgun blasting for oil and gas along the coast of Maryland. We urge you to halt seismic permits, as airgun use to search for oil and gas offshore Maryland is a direct threat to our local economies, our bountiful marine life, and the beautiful Ocean City environment that we enjoy every day. The costs of oil and gas drilling in the Atlantic far outweigh any potential benefits, especially for Maryland, and we ask that you remove the Mid- and South-Atlantic planning areas from the 2017-2022 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Jones".

Susan Jones
Executive Director, Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association

CC:

The Honorable Larry Hogan, Governor of Maryland
U.S. Representative Andy Harris (MD-1)
Ms. Kathryn Sullivan, Secretary, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association
Ms. Eileen Sobek, Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service