

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 10, 2015

The Honorable Abigail Ross Hopper
Director
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Hopper:

We are writing regarding seismic airgun surveying in the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). We request that the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management immediately retract the Record of Decision (ROD) for the environmental review of proposed geological and geophysical activities (G&G) for the Atlantic OCS. We ask you to prepare a new Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) based on the many studies that show harm to fisheries and marine mammals due to human-produced noise, including seismic airgun testing.

We have several concerns about the G&G activities proposed for the Atlantic off our shores. The seismic information gathered by the companies will be proprietary, and any information gathered in the Atlantic about offshore energy resources *will not* be available to states, the public, or other companies. Therefore, states will not gain information from seismic airgun testing that would enable them to make a cost-benefit analysis as to whether the risks posed by offshore drilling would outweigh any benefits derived from offshore energy extraction.

Seismic airgun exploration is an enormously disruptive activity in the ocean. A significant body of peer-reviewed science demonstrates that seismic airgun testing results in massive displacement of fish, causes catch rates of some commercial fish to plummet, and disrupts vital feeding and breeding behaviors in endangered whales. Also, since seismic companies will not be sharing information, seismic airgun testing will be repeated over and over again in the same areas by each company that seeks information about offshore energy resources, unnecessarily exposing fish and marine animals to repeated rounds of seismic testing.

Opposition to seismic airgun testing is widespread and growing. Close to 90 towns, cities, and counties along the Atlantic coast have passed resolutions opposing seismic testing and/or offshore oil drilling. The Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils have taken formal positions in opposition. Responding in May 2014 to the final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, the Mid-Atlantic Council wrote, "It is clear that G&G activities can have substantial impacts on marine ecosystems, yet the final PEIS provides

insufficient information about how the proposed G&G activities may affect fish, marine mammals, benthic communities, and ecosystem structure and function.”

In March 2015, a group of 75 scientists, including some of the world’s leading experts in marine biology, called on the administration to reverse its decision to permit seismic surveys in the Atlantic, citing “significant, long-lasting, and widespread impacts” on the region’s fish and marine mammal populations should it proceed. The PEIS failed to analyze these recognized large-scale impacts of seismic surveys on fish and marine mammals, and to develop alternatives that sufficiently protect wildlife and our coastal economies.

Finally, we note with deep concern that seismic airgun testing is the first step in the process of offshore oil drilling. Along the Atlantic coast, nearly 1.4 million jobs and more than \$95 billion in GDP rely on healthy ocean ecosystems, mainly through fishing, tourism, and recreation. Seismic testing and oil drilling will put the coastal economy and way of life at risk, due to industrialization of the coast, daily impacts and regular spills from oil drilling activities, and possible catastrophic accidents like the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

The authorizations required by federal law are essential to assessing, minimizing, and preventing this cost, but BOEM’s environmental review of proposed G&G activities fails to account for the true and complete range of impacts. Yet the permitting process continues to move forward, most recently with the announcement by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that four applications from seismic companies seeking permission to cause harm to marine mammals are now complete and under review by that agency.

We call on you to withdraw the Record of Decision immediately and prepare a new environmental review (PEIS) of proposed geological and geophysical activities for the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic OCS planning areas. Until such a document and a new ROD are issued, BOEM should not issue individual permits for this activity.

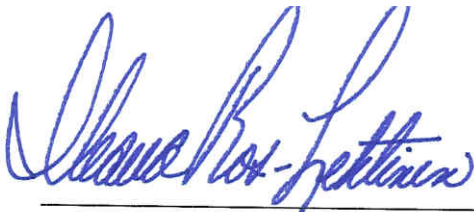
Sincerely,


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BOBBY SCOTT
Member of Congress


CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress

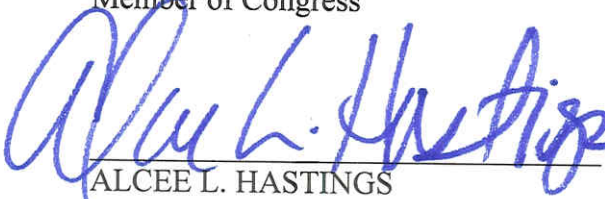

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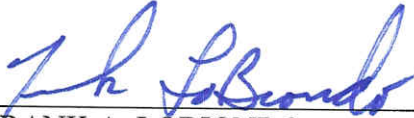
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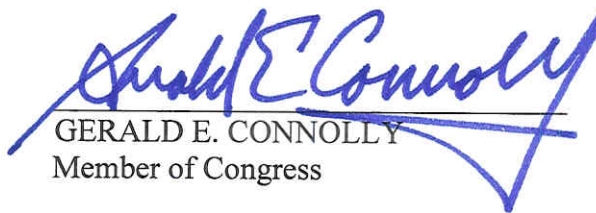
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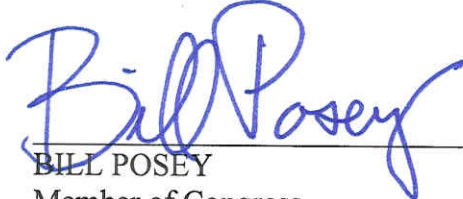
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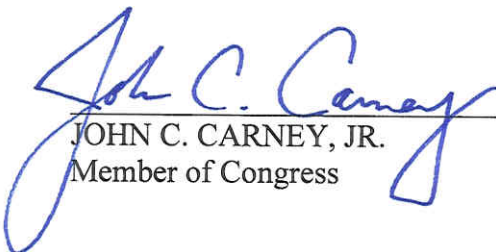
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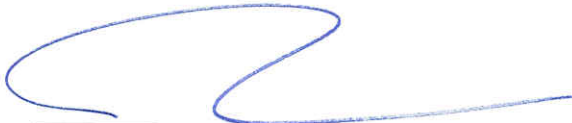
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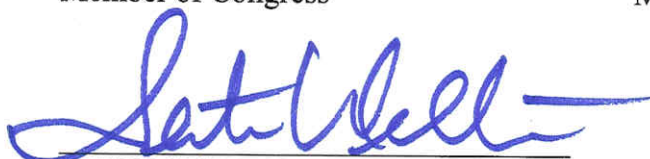
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