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Don't harm marine life when having a blast: Editorial

In New Jersey, suspected or real dangers of "fracking," from increased risk of earthquakes to private-well water that catches fire, are theoretical.

While Gov. Chris Christie has refused to sign a ban on this method of unearthing oil and natural gas by fracturing underground rock, it's not taking place here. If there are any such energy-containing deposits in New Jersey, they're not worth the time or money for Big Oil to go after.

But one needs to look no farther than our shore to see some similar, though not identical, man-made underground disturbances raise environmental concerns. And we can't even heat our homes with the results.

On Tuesday, the National Marine Fisheries Service signed off on a plan to conduct seismic testing on the ocean floor off Long Beach Island. A broad coalition of environmental groups, fishing interests and lawmakers fear that the tests would harm or kill marine life, including dolphins, whales and various types of fish.

The project was proposed for this summer by the National Science Foundation and three universities. Tests were originally to start in June.

The New Jersey Sierra Club's Jeff Tittel said of the OK: "This is the way NMFS celebrates Fourth of July, with underwater fireworks."

The tests do have a scientific purpose. They'll plot ocean sediment over 60 million years, and check changes in sea level and geological features. Columbia University, the University of Texas and Rutgers are all participants.

U.S. Reps. Frank LoBiondo, R-2, of Ventnor, and Chris Smith, R-4, both strongly condemned Tuesday's permit. LoBiondo was slated to speak late Wednesday at an opponents' rally in Barnegat Light. All of the opponents note that approvals are not yet final.

Have the dangers to turtles, whales, etc. from the noisy blasts been overstated? Aren't we curious about what's been in that sediment so long?

Sure we are, but let's make certain that all of the effects on marine life have been studied adequately before going ahead. If we waited 60 million years, we can wait a little longer.