March 25, 2015

Mr. Geoffrey L. Wikel, Acting Chief, Division of Environmental Assessment
Office of Environmental Program, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (HM 3107)
381 Elden Street
Herndon, VA 20170-4817

Re: Offshore Drilling Activities/Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS)
    “Scoping Comments for the 2017-2022 Proposed Oil and Gas Leasing Program
    PEIS”

Dear Mr. Wikel:

The Town of Hilton Head Island has developed into a nationally and internationally
known premier resort and retirement community. The Island appeals to retirees,
visitors, and permanent residents due to its favorable climate, environmental
attractiveness, and sensitivity to environmental preservation. As we understand, the
U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is currently in the process of
trying to open the mid-Atlantic Ocean to exploration and development of offshore oil
and gas including risky methods, such as seismic blasting. The Town is concerned
about the potential impacts of seismic testing and offshore drilling to marine and
aquatic life in the Atlantic Ocean as we believe the full impacts are not yet fully
understood by scientists, the oil and gas industry, the Bureau of Ocean Energy
Management or the Federal Government.

In addition, the Town is concerned about the potential risk of spill that the exploratory
and commercial drilling, extraction, and transportation of offshore oil and gas
resources pose to our coastal region. Offshore drilling activities pose threats for
coastal wetland areas of Hilton Head Island, which are of intrinsic ecological value for
numerous migratory bird species, serve as essential nursery habitats for recreational
and commercially important fisheries, and act as natural buffers from storm surge and
hurricanes. The Town of Hilton Head Island is an Atlantic coastal community that
relies heavily on tourism, which contributes an estimated $1.5 billion into the Hilton
Head Island area economy annually. As evidenced by the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon
disaster, a major oil spill can impact thousands of miles of coastline, devastate local
economies like Hilton Head Island and wreak havoc on the marine and coastal
environment. Therefore, any drilling allowed on the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf
represents a threat to the South Carolina coast.
Mr. Geoffrey L. Wikel, Acting Chief, Division of Environmental Assessment  
March 25, 2015  
Page Two

The Town of Hilton Head Island Town Council opposes seismic testing and offshore oil and gas development off the South Carolina coast. We believe more research should be conducted to fully understand and to better address the impacts of seismic testing and the options for mitigating those impacts before exploration begins. Let’s all work together to fully address the long-term energy needs of our country, which the exploration and development of oil and natural gas off the mid-Atlantic coast will not effectively accomplish and has the potential to do significant harm both ecologically and economically.

Sincerely,

TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

[Signature]

David Bennett, Mayor

CC:  
Town Council  
Stephen G. Riley, ICMA-CM, Town Manager  
Beaufort County Legislative Delegation Members  
Billy Keyserling, Mayor, City of Beaufort  
Lisa Sulka, Mayor, Town of Bluffton  
Samuel E. Murray, Mayor, Town of Port Royal  
Stu Rodman, Beaufort County Council Member  
Lindsey Graham, U.S. Senator  
Tim Scott, U.S. Senator  
Mark Sanford, U.S. House of Representatives