



EDITORIAL, June 9: Forgo seismic blasting -- at least for now

By StarNews Editorial Board

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If kids in your neighborhood were shooting off fireworks, and the occasional dynamite stick, outside your house at all hours, you'd call the police.

But that's basically what we're about to do to whales, dolphins, sea turtles and schools of food fish off the North Carolina coast.

The Trump administration has decided to reopen the Atlantic coast from Delaware through Florida to seismic testing.

Basically, oil and gas companies fire an air gun underwater to send out sound waves. These sound waves bounce off the ocean floor, and geologists can study the results to find possible pockets of oil and natural gas. If those pockets are big enough, the companies might try drilling for them.

Sound carries much better in water than in air, so these sound waves can travel thousands of miles. Marine biologists have a pile of studies showing they aren't good for marine mammals -- whales, dolphins and seals -- who often rely on hearing and a natural sonar to find food.

They're also known to mess with sea turtles and with fish -- which means messing with commercial and recreational fishing.

Officials say the air guns will be "ramped up" slowly, to scare off any nearby marine life before they let go full blast. That's assuming, the marine life will come back after the prospectors are done.

This is even before we ponder the idea of having another Deepwater Horizon disaster right off your beach condo. (The Obama administration had limited testing and possible drilling to 50 miles off the coast. The Trump administration erased that barrier.)

Now, if this were 2008 -- when gasoline prices were edging toward \$5 per gallon, and the nation seemed in hock to OPEC -- we might have a debate here.

But gasoline prices are up a tad lately, but still close to 1972 levels when adjusted for inflation. Natural gas is plentiful from wells ashore.

The question, then, is why do we want to encourage drilling now? Wouldn't it be better to leave these potentially risky offshore fields alone, at least for the time being?

Between now and July 7, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's fisheries office is accepting public comments on Atlantic air gun tests. If you value Nature and your seafood dinner, now's the time to write a letter.

Send an email to ITP.Laws@noaa.gov or U.S. mail to Jolie Harrison, Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service; 1315 East-West Highway; Silver Spring, MD 20910

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