

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 6, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretaries Ross and Zinke:

We strongly oppose the Administration's recent decision to issue five Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) permits for companies planning to conduct seismic geological and geophysical surveys along the Atlantic coast—a major step toward offshore oil and gas drilling. We urge the Department of the Interior to deny the final seismic survey permits for Atlantic geological and geophysical exploration.

These permits authorize five companies to use seismic airguns that can disturb, harm, and potentially kill not only marine mammals but also a wide range of marine life that support coastal economies from Florida to Maine. Offshore oil and gas exploration and development, the first step of which is seismic airgun testing, puts at risk coastal economies based on fishing, tourism, and recreation. Numerous studies show the detrimental impacts seismic airgun blasting has on fisheries and marine mammals, thereby affecting the catch anglers bring dockside and the revenue generated by related businesses.


A 2014 study conducted off North Carolina's coast by the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Duke University and NOAA found that, during seismic surveying, the abundance of reef-fish declined by 78 percent during evening hours, a time of day when fish use of that same habitat was highest on the previous three days when seismic surveys were not being conducted. The tertiary effects of this trickle down to fishing businesses, restaurants and the visitors that flock to our coastal communities.

Some proponents of opening drilling in the Atlantic make the argument that seismic airgun surveys for oil and gas deposits would allow local communities to learn more about what resources might be available. The reality is that, by law, the data obtained from seismic surveys are proprietary and only available to the oil and gas industry. The public, local government officials and even Members of Congress would not have access to the survey data. This inability to access information leaves coastal communities without the opportunity to perform substantive cost-benefit analyses for extracting oil and gas reserves off their coasts. Our constituents would be left taking on significant risk without being involved in future development decisions.

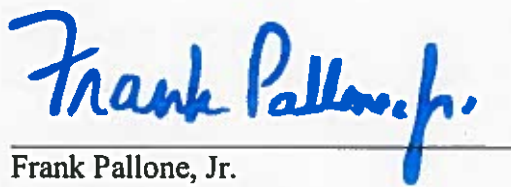
We hear from countless business owners, elected officials and residents along our coasts who recognize and reject the risks of offshore oil and gas development. More than 220 local municipalities have passed formal resolutions opposing oil and gas exploration and/or drilling in the Atlantic or Eastern Gulf. These include numerous local chambers of commerce, tourism and restaurant associations, commercial and recreational fishing associations, and the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils. Nearly 2,000 local, state and federal officials, including all but two Governors of states bordering the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, have formally opposed or expressed substantial concerns about expanded offshore oil and gas development. Local chambers of commerce, tourism and restaurant associations, and an alliance representing over 43,000 businesses and 500,000 commercial fishing families strongly oppose offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling. Further, NASA, the Department of Defense, and the Florida Defense Support Task Force have also expressed concern with offshore oil and gas development threatening their ability to perform critical activities.

Opening the Atlantic to seismic testing and drilling jeopardizes our coastal businesses, fishing communities, tourism, and our national security. It harms our coastal economies in the near term and opens the door to even greater risks from offshore oil and gas production down the road. Given the significant environmental and economic risks, we strongly oppose the issuance of IHA permits for companies seeking to conduct seismic testing in the Atlantic. We therefore urge the Administration not to issue final seismic airgun blasting permits for the Atlantic Ocean.

Sincerely,



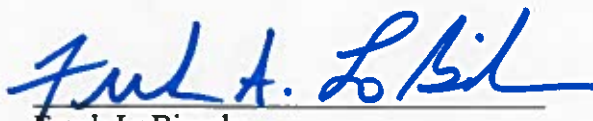
John Rutherford
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Frank LoBiondo
Member of Congress





John

Mike Dingler

Jimmy McHenry

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Eric Swalley

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