January 20, 2026

Ms. Kelly Hammerle
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (VAM-LD)
45600 Woodland Road
Sterling, VA 20166-9216
Via http://www.regulations.gov

Re: Public Comment on the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program (Docket ID: BOEM-2025-0482)

Dear Ms. Hammerle:

The Board of County Commissioners of Charlotte County, Florida, respectfully submits this comment regarding the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program. While we recognize the important role that energy production plays in our nation's economy and security, we have significant concerns about the proposed expansion of offshore oil and gas leasing in the Gulf off Florida's coast. As a Gulf Coast county with communities including Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte, and Englewood directly facing the areas under consideration, Charlotte County would face immediate exposure to the risks associated with expanded drilling operations.

Economic Considerations and Community Investment

Charlotte County has experienced substantial growth as families and retirees have chosen our community for its attractive coastal environment and quality of life. Our economic foundation depends significantly on maintaining clean beaches, healthy marine ecosystems, and pristine coastal waters. The real estate market, tourism sector, fishing industries, and waterfront businesses all contribute to our local economy and tax base, and these sectors rely on the continued environmental quality of our Gulf Coast location.

Our community has made considerable investments in infrastructure, economic development, and quality of life improvements that have positioned Charlotte County as a premier Southwest Florida destination. Property values throughout the county reflect the premium that residents and investors place on our coastal setting and natural amenities. The proximity of offshore drilling operations to our shoreline could negatively impact these values and undermine the economic progress our community has worked to achieve.

Gulf Current Patterns and Geographic Vulnerability

Charlotte County's location on the Gulf Coast places our community in a position of direct exposure to potential impacts from the proposed leasing areas. The prevailing current patterns in the eastern Gulf mean that any significant incident in the proposed drilling areas would likely affect our extensive coastline, barrier islands, and estuary systems. The Charlotte Harbor estuary represents one of Florida's

most productive coastal ecosystems, supporting important fisheries and providing substantial ecological and economic value to our region. Potential damage from energy exploration activities would be catastrophic to our estuary.

We appreciate that the industry has made efforts to improve safety standards since the 2010 Deepwater Horizon incident. However, that event demonstrated that even with modern technology and safety protocols, catastrophic failures can occur. Given Charlotte County's proximity to the proposed leasing areas and our direct exposure through Gulf current patterns, we believe the potential consequences of any similar incident would be severe for our community.

Fishing and Marine Resources

Charlotte County supports both commercial and recreational fishing that depend on healthy, productive Gulf waters and provide important economic and cultural value to our community. Commercial fishermen operating from our community contribute to Florida's seafood industry, while recreational fishing attracts visitors and supports numerous marine-related businesses throughout the county.

Offshore drilling operations could create conflicts with these established uses of Gulf waters through exclusion zones, vessel traffic, and infrastructure that might interfere with traditional fishing grounds. We are also concerned about potential impacts to water quality and fish stocks that could affect the productivity of our fisheries.

National Security and Military Readiness Concerns

Our state economy is further supported by the critical military training activities that take place in the Eastern Gulf Test and Training Range, which serves all branches of the United States military. The training and testing operations based out of Naval Air Station Key West, Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City, and Eglin, Tyndall, and MacDill Air Force Bases rely on unfettered access to the air and sea space over the Eastern Gulf.

The proposed oil exploration threatens this long-standing, encroachment-free access that our military services require for training and operational readiness. The introduction of offshore drilling infrastructure would create conflicts with military operations, potentially compromising the effectiveness of training exercises that are essential to national defense. At a time when military readiness is paramount, we cannot afford to encumber critical training areas with industrial oil and gas operations.

Request for Consideration of Coastal Community Interests

Charlotte County recognizes the complex balance between energy needs and coastal protection. We appreciate that difficult decisions must be made regarding the nation's energy portfolio and the use of federal offshore resources. However, we respectfully ask that the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

consider the interests of coastal communities that would bear disproportionate risks from expanded offshore drilling while receiving limited direct benefits from such development.

Our county's economy, natural resources, and community character are directly tied to the environmental quality of our Gulf Coast location. The proposed leasing areas would bring industrial operations closer to our shores than current activities, increasing our exposure to both operational impacts and the risks of accidents or spills. We believe these local impacts deserve substantial weight in federal decision-making about offshore resource development.

We encourage the Bureau to carefully evaluate whether the proposed expansion in the eastern Gulf provides sufficient national benefit to justify the risks imposed on Florida's Gulf Coast communities. Alternative approaches, including focusing development in areas more distant from populated coastlines or emphasizing domestic energy sources that do not carry the same coastal risks, might better balance national energy needs with the protection of coastal economies and resources.

Conclusion

The Board of County Commissioners of Charlotte County respectfully requests that the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management exclude new offshore oil and gas leasing areas in the Gulf off the coast of Florida from the final 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program. We believe this exclusion would appropriately recognize the significant risks that expanded offshore drilling poses to our coastal community while supporting the continued economic vitality and environmental quality that Charlotte County residents and visitors value.

We also express our support for S. 3082, the American Shores Protection Act of 2025, sponsored by Senator Ashley Moody and co-sponsored by Senators Rick Scott and Lindsey Graham, which would permanently bar oil and gas drilling off the coasts of Florida, including the Eastern Gulf. This legislation represents the kind of lasting protection that our coasts require and deserve.

We appreciate your consideration of Charlotte County's perspective on this important matter and stand ready to provide any additional information that may be helpful in your deliberations.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph M. Tiseo, Chairman
Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners

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JT/es