



**BUSINESS ALLIANCE FOR PROTECTING
THE ATLANTIC COAST**

July 21, 2017

The Honorable Terry McAuliffe
Common Ground for Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor McAuliffe,

The Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast (BAPAC) urges you to oppose offshore drilling and seismic airgun blasting for subsea oil and gas deposits in the Atlantic Ocean. BAPAC represents over 41,000 businesses and 500,000 commercial fishing families from Maine to Florida, all of which thrive largely as result of a healthy Atlantic Ocean which is threatened by offshore oil and gas activities.

We ask that you formally comment in opposition on the recent issuance of Incidental Harassment Authorizations by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). This process is the first step to issuing permits that could allow geophysical & geological (G&G) companies to injure and disrupt marine mammals as they blast the water column with seismic airguns to search for subsea oil and gas deposits, a destructive exploration process.

The Department of Interior estimates that proposed seismic airgun blasting off the East Coast could injure up to 138,000 marine mammals and disturb millions more. These marine mammals are an integral part of the Atlantic Coast tourism economy. In their healthy state these animals are eagerly sought out by tourists using small business sight-seeing vessels. When these mammals are injured or harassed by seismic blasting, the response is at a minimum displacement and at worse stranding and death on beaches.

Various fish species have been scientifically shown to be impacted by seismic airgun blasting. In 2014, the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Duke University, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conducted a study of reef-fish during seismic surveying. The results showed a 78% decline in reef-fish abundance during the evening hours when fish habitat use was highest on the previous three days without seismic noise. According to the study, “the significant reduction in fish occupation of the reef represents disruption to daily pattern.” Another study by Engas, Lokkeborg, Ona and Vold Soldal showed trawl catches of cod and haddock, and longline catches of haddock declined by about 70%, and longline catches of cod by 45% after seismic surveys started. Furthermore, the study found that “abundance of catch rates did not return to preshooting levels during the 5-day period after seismic shooting ended.” Our commercial fisherman should not bear the brunt of impacts from the oil and gas industry.

The exploration involves more than seismic blasting. It also requires offshore oil and gas drilling to definitively locate deposits, putting our coastline at risk of chronic oil spills, and the looming threat of another BP Deepwater Horizon-like disaster.

Offshore drilling and exploration are simply incompatible with our sustainable coastal tourism, commercial fishing, and recreation economies. Such long-standing Atlantic Ocean use not only fuels our regional economies, but also defines the lifestyle of coastal communities up and down the entire eastern seaboard.

If East Coast communities are exposed to dirty and dangerous offshore drilling and exploration, we put today's nearly 1.4 million jobs and over \$95 billion in annual gross domestic product at risk. The past administration attempted to open the Atlantic Ocean to offshore drilling activities, but instead ignited a groundswell of local opposition which ultimately compelled the White House to remove the Atlantic from consideration. To date, 125 East Coast municipalities and more than 1,200 elected officials have formally opposed seismic airgun blasting and/or offshore drilling, as well as the Mid- and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, NASA, the Department of Defense, and the Florida Defense Support Task Force. Coastal communities simply do not want offshore drilling, and without the desire to drill, it is simply unnecessary and unduly economically harmful to explore for oil and gas deposits.

As the opposition only continues to grow in recent months, the Trump Administration would be wary to revisit this issue. President Trump's recent executive order puts Atlantic waters back on the table for potential offshore drilling and fast-tracks harmful seismic airgun blasting – creating an uncertain economic future and jeopardizing the livelihoods of millions of Americans.

We urge you to use your authority as governors to publicly oppose offshore exploration and drilling in the Atlantic. We ask that you formally oppose these risky, short-term endeavors that favor only oil companies, and instead put local businesses and fishing communities first.

Sincerely,



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