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Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

Don't drill — or survey, either



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South Carolina's coastal communities have clearly said that they didn't want offshore oil drilling. They have cited the potential ill effects to the coast's tourism-based economy and to the environment that helps support it.

And to its credit, the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has reversed its position on offshore drilling, based in part on public opposition in South Carolina and other states along the Atlantic seaboard.

Our S.C. coastal communities have also said, virtually as one, that they opposed the controversial testing for oil and natural gas, recognizing the potential harm of the seismic airgun noises to the marine environment.

Marine scientists from universities, research institutes and aquariums located in coastal states agree with that position, and a recent letter to President Barack Obama explains why.

It cited the known "large-scale effects" of seismic testing on a variety of whale species, and noted the likelihood of harm to the highly endangered right whale species, which calve off the southern Atlantic coast, including South Carolina's.

The 35 scientists' affiliations include the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Duke University, the Ocean Alliance, the New England Aquarium, the Scottish Oceans Institute, Cornell University, Syracuse University and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

“The additional stress of widespread seismic airgun surveys may well represent a tipping point for the survival of this endangered whale, contributing significantly to a decline towards extinction,” they wrote.

And for what? Since the federal moratorium on drilling will remain in place, the exploration for resources seems superfluous at best. The scientific objections should encourage further federal restrictions on these offshore surveys.

The scientists reasonably seek a suspension of offshore surveys until an assessment of its effects can be done by the Department of the Interior.

But as long as the offshore drilling moratorium remains in effect, there is little point in allowing for surveys that only exist as a preliminary to offshore drilling.

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