

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 19, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to express our serious concerns about potential offshore oil and gas development in Canadian waters off the coast of New England. This exploration, and any subsequent production, could have severe consequences on our marine life and the coastal communities that depend on our ocean's resources.

The Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board (the Board) is an independent joint agency of the Governments of Canada and Nova Scotia that is responsible for the regulation of petroleum-related activities. On January 15th, the Board issued two exploration licenses to the Norwegian oil company Statoil Canada. These licenses give Statoil Canada the exclusive right to develop and explore two offshore parcels located on the Western edge of the Scotian Shelf. This opens the door to the controversial practice of seismic airgun blasting, which is used to locate oil and gas beneath the seafloor.

The proximity of these parcels to Georges Bank – less than 230 miles from Bar Harbor, Maine – is deeply concerning.¹ Numerous scientific studies have demonstrated that the noise from seismic airgun blasts can travel long distances of up to 2,500 miles from their source and that this noise can result in the massive displacement of fish.² Our fishing communities are already struggling to adapt to multiple stressors, including the rapid warming of ocean waters and increased ship traffic. Seismic airgun blasts could further stress these already-burdened fisheries with potentially disastrous results.

It is also important to note that offshore oil and gas exploration could compromise protected areas of the Gerry E. Studds Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Since 1992, this 842-square-mile area has enjoyed protected status in recognition of its unique importance to marine life, including commercially important groundfish, such as Atlantic cod and haddock.³

¹ <http://www.pressherald.com/2015/12/01/nova-scotia-approves-oil-exploration-lease-next-to-georges-bank-entrance-to-gulf-of-maine/>

² Nieuwkirk, S. L., Mellinger, D. K., Moore, S. E., Klinck, K., Dziak, R. P., & Goslin, J. (2012). Sounds from airguns and fins whales recorded in the mid-Atlantic Ocean, 1999-2009. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 131(2), 1102-1112.

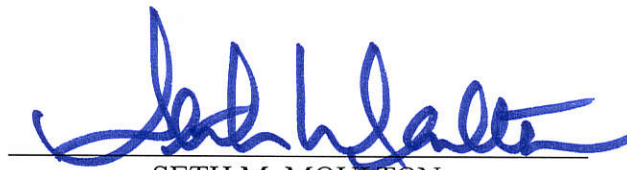
³ <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/visit/fishingrec/species.html>

The richness and productivity of Stellwagen Bank also makes it a vital feeding ground for several types of whales, including the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale.⁴ Seismic airgun blasting could threaten not only these marine organisms, but also the fishing and tourism industries that fuel New England's economy.

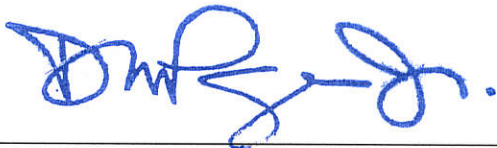
Finally, we wish to draw your attention to the recent problems Shell Canada has encountered in their exploratory drilling on the Scotian Shelf. In early March of this year, Shell Canada was forced to disconnect from and seal an exploratory well in preparation for severe weather. The turbulent sea conditions forced the release of a massive drilling pipe, which sank to the seafloor.⁵ While the Board suspended operations until a full investigation is completed, the two kilometer pipe remains on the sea floor – a reminder of the unpredictable North Atlantic Ocean environment.

We urge you to begin conversations at the highest possible level with Canadian policymakers to discuss our concerns about seismic airgun blasting in the Statoil Canada parcels. We are extremely worried about the disruptive impact of these activities on New England's marine ecosystems and marine life, as well as the industries that depend on them. We believe that permitting oil and gas exploration and production activities in such a valuable, sensitive area is an unnecessary and risky venture that should be suspended until the concerns outlined in this letter are addressed.

Sincerely,



SETH M. MOULTON
Member of Congress



DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.
Member of Congress



ALAN LOWENTHAL
Member of Congress

⁴ <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/about/faq.html#whales>

⁵ Ruskin, Brett. "Shell Canada Offshore Drill Incident Drops Equipment to Sea Floor." *CBC News*. 7 Mar. 2016. Web. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/shell-offshore-oil-equipment-incident-1.3479164>.



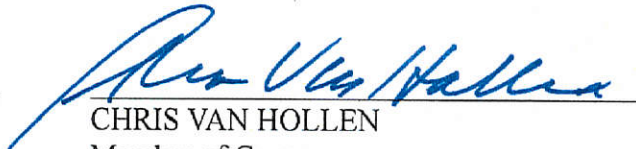
MATTHEW A. CARTWRIGHT
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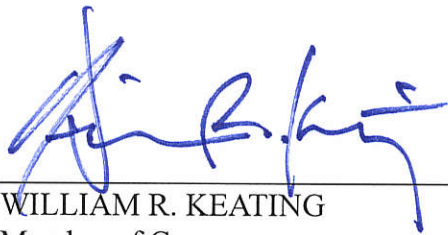
ALAN GRAYSON
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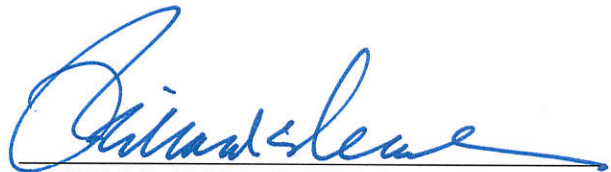
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MARK POCAN
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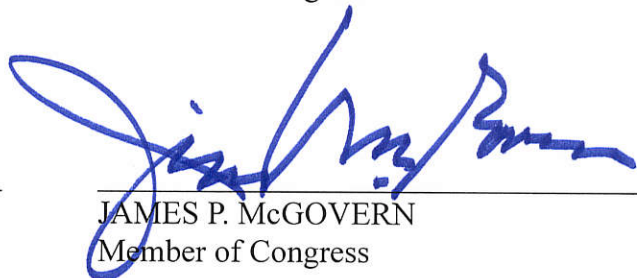
WILLIAM R. KEATING
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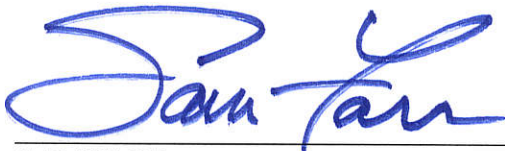
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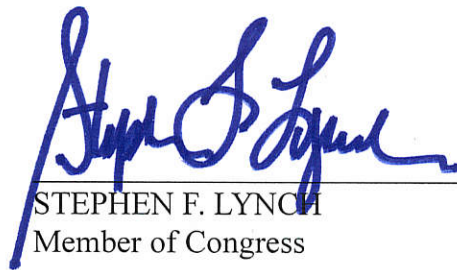
SAM FARR
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