

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 12, 2019

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

The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Ross and Acting Secretary Bernhardt:

We are writing to express our opposition to the November 30, 2018 issuance by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of five Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) permits—a significant step in allowing five companies to conduct widespread seismic airgun blasting in the Atlantic Ocean for the purposes of oil and gas exploration. We request that the Department of Commerce revoke these IHAs, and that the Department of the Interior refrain from issuing final seismic survey permits for geological and geophysical exploration off the coast of Virginia. In addition, we oppose the inclusion of the Commonwealth's offshore area in the final 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

The administration's recent decision to issue these IHA permits runs counter to the explicit wishes of coastal communities up and down the Atlantic that would be at risk from offshore drilling and exploration. Over 240 localities on the East Coast and Florida's Gulf Coast, 1,600 elected officials, 42,000 businesses, and 500,000 fishing families from Florida to Maine have all voiced their opposition to oil and gas activities.<sup>1</sup> They recognize that these activities have the potential for serious impacts on everything from tourism to fishing catch rates—important sectors of these local economies.

In Virginia alone, more than 20 communities have officially voiced their opposition to seismic surveys and offshore drilling, including Virginia Beach and Norfolk – Virginia's most populous cities. The Commonwealth has a diverse and robust economy based on sectors like tourism, recreation, aquaculture, deepwater port commerce, and Department of Defense infrastructure. Moving forward with seismic testing and offshore drilling could threaten these critical engines of Virginia's economy, along with the valuable ecosystems along the coast and within the Chesapeake Bay. These shores, and the ecosystems and jobs they support, are simply too vital to the Commonwealth to risk.

Studies have shown that seismic airgun blasting, which involves loud, disruptive, and repeated blasting for days or weeks at a time, can have harmful effects on marine life, including endangered species and essential fish stocks. The repeated, loud noises from seismic airgun surveying could negatively impact the

---

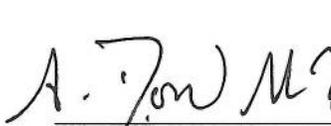
<sup>1</sup> <https://usa.oceana.org/climate-and-energy/grassroots-opposition-offshore-drilling-and-exploration-atlantic-ocean-and>

ability of marine life to feed, reproduce, and navigate. Whales and dolphins, which rely on hearing for all aspects of life, can be particularly impacted. The North Atlantic right whale—which is critically endangered—would face threats of particular severity.<sup>2</sup> The impacts of surveying could also potentially diminish fish stocks along Virginia’s coast, putting at risk these communities that rely upon commercial and recreational fishing.

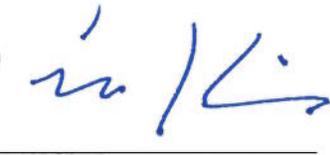
Our constituents remain concerned with the administration’s efforts to open the Commonwealth’s offshore area to oil and gas exploration and drilling. Accordingly, we again request that the Department of Commerce revoke these IHAs, and that the Department of the Interior deny all pending seismic survey permits for the Atlantic. We also reiterate our request that Virginia’s offshore area be excluded from the Department of the Interior’s 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for offshore drilling.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

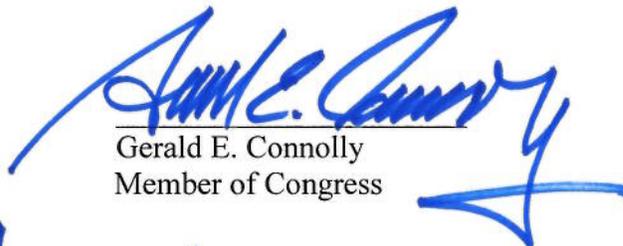
Sincerely,

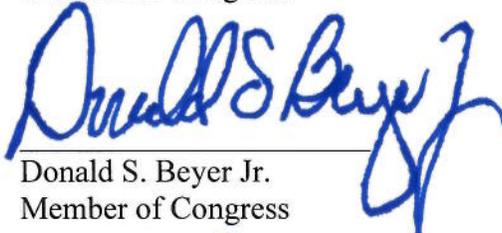
  
A. Don McEachin  
Member of Congress

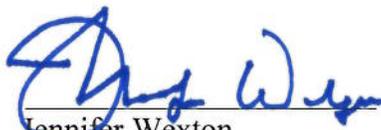
  
Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

  
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

  
Robert C. “Bobby” Scott  
Member of Congress

  
Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress

  
Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress

  
Jennifer Wexton  
Member of Congress

  
Elaine G. Luria  
Member of Congress

  
Abigail D. Spanberger  
Member of Congress

<sup>2</sup>[https://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/662/statement.\\_seismic\\_and\\_north\\_atlantic\\_right\\_whales.\\_14\\_april\\_2016.pdf](https://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/662/statement._seismic_and_north_atlantic_right_whales._14_april_2016.pdf)