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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

June 12, 2018

Dr. Walter Cruickshank
Acting Director
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Mr. Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Cruickshank & Mr. Oliver,

I am writing to urge you to reject the authorizations and permits requested of your agencies to allow for the use of seismic airgun surveys for oil and gas exploration in the Atlantic Ocean. Specifically, I urge the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to reject requested incidental harassment authorizations (IHAs) to take marine mammals incidental to conducting geophysical survey activity in the Atlantic Ocean and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to reject the Geological and Geophysical permits in the Atlantic currently under review.

The IHAs and Geological and Geophysical permits have been requested for the purposes of using seismic airgun arrays to support oil and gas exploration, which is strongly opposed by the majority of states along the Atlantic coast because of the significant potential for harm to the environment and coastal economies from oil and gas drilling.

The noise created by the use of seismic airgun arrays poses a substantial risk to marine ecosystems and the whales, fish and other aquatic species that live in the Atlantic. The proposed locations for the seismic surveys are in close proximity to critical habitat for the North Atlantic Right Whale. Introducing the use of airguns in this area could have a devastating impact on that endangered species, which is already suffering from a significant decline in population and is threatened by the possibility of extinction. According to the NOAA Fisheries, noise poses a threat to this species.¹ The introduction of a new source of noise that could impair the recovery of this species should be rejected.

There are also concerns about the impact of seismic airgun blasting on fisheries, which are relied on to support coastal economies and the commercial and recreational fishing industries that contribute billions of dollars to the economy and support hundreds of thousands of jobs. The disruption to these fisheries resulting from seismic surveys could result in long-term harm to an

¹ <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/mammals/whales/north-atlantic-right-whale.html>

already fragile industry. In addition to its importance to the local economies and industries of New York State, protecting the Atlantic from environmental degradation and ecological damage is essential to the health and welfare of my constituents.

Opening up the Atlantic to this harmful and nuisance-causing testing in order to support the exploration for oil and gas, which we on the coast do not want and do not need, should not be approved by your agencies. This activity runs counter to the Federal government's responsibility to be a good steward of our nation's ocean resources and their habitat. In addition, it is clear that the affected states along our coast do not support this activity. Offshore drilling in the Atlantic is opposed by the Republican and Democratic Governors of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida. It is rare that all of these states would agree on energy and environmental policy, however, each recognizes the high stakes for the industries that rely on our proximity to the Atlantic, including tourism and fishing.

I hope that you will carefully consider these concerns, and that your agencies will disapprove of the requested IHAs and permits for the Atlantic Ocean. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator