Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 11, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

We write today regarding the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program. In January 2015, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management released the Draft Proposed Program for the 2017-2022 Five-Year Program. The Draft Proposed Program proposes opening areas in the Mid and South-Atlantic planning areas for oil and gas development, spanning from Virginia to Georgia. As your Department prepares to release the Proposed Five-Year Program, we respectfully request that you remove the Atlantic planning areas from inclusion in the program.

In 2010, the Department of the Interior released a proposed 2012-2017 Five-Year Program that would have opened a broad swath of the Atlantic coast from Delaware to Florida for oil and gas development. Tragically, just weeks after this proposal was released an explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig and the ensuing oil spill created a massive environmental disaster impacting the entire Gulf of Mexico region. In the aftermath of this disaster, Congress created the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. Unfortunately, Congress has failed to enact virtually every reform recommended in the commission's final report.

Coastal communities along the Atlantic coast are all dependent upon a clean, safe and ecologically vibrant environment to support their economies. Opening areas in the Mid and South-Atlantic to oil and gas development will put all of this at risk. In Atlantic coast states, almost 1.4 million jobs are connected to fishing, tourism and recreation, leading to over $95 billion in gross domestic product. According to 2010 census data, 39 percent of the U.S. population is concentrated in counties directly on the shoreline. As the Deepwater Horizon spill clearly showed, oil spills do not respect state borders. A spill anywhere in the Atlantic would cause environmental damage all along the coast. We simply cannot risk the health and vitality of our coastal communities for the sake of expanding oil and gas development.

While we are steadfastly opposed to offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean, we are not opposed to harnessing energy from the ocean. But this energy must come from renewable methods such as wind power, and not fossil fuels that will threaten the ecological vitality of the region. The Atlantic Ocean has tremendous untapped potential for development of offshore wind energy production. Your agency has taken positive steps by leasing federal waters for wind energy development in the Atlantic Ocean. We encourage you to focus your agency's efforts on development of this clean, renewable energy resource that will not have a damaging impact on the health of the Atlantic Ocean and the economies of coastal communities.

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

As the Department of the Interior finalizes the next iteration of the Five-Year Program for publication, we strongly urge you to remove the Mid- and South-Atlantic Planning Areas from inclusion in the proposal. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Mark Sanford
Member of Congress

Charles Rangel
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Frank LoBiondo
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress

Donald Norcross
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

John C. Carney
Member of Congress

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

James Langevin
Member of Congress

Patrick E. Murphy
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Paul Tonko
Member of Congress

Steve Israel
Member of Congress

Corrine Brown
Member of Congress

Bill Keating
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer, Jr.
Member of Congress

David E. Price
Member of Congress

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress