

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 18, 2014

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our opposition to your administration's desire to conduct seismic air gun testing for oil and gas in the Atlantic Ocean, specifically off the coast of Florida. Not only is this proposed action the first major step toward opening the Atlantic Ocean to offshore drilling, which is potentially devastating for the state's economy, but the technology used for this exploration is also incredibly harmful to marine mammals and fisheries in the region.

Deepwater drilling is the same practice that brought us the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. The spill hammered our coastal communities and though it occurred more than four years ago, the extent of its effects on the Gulf are still being revealed. A recent study found, for example, that mahi mahi embryos that have come in contact with oil from the spill swim much more slowly than fish that haven't been exposed.

Expanding unnecessary drilling offshore simply puts too much at risk. Florida has more coastline than any other state in the continental United States and its beaches and marine resources support the local economy across the state. For example, the gross domestic product (GDP) from Florida's living resources, which includes fishing, hatcheries, aquaculture, seafood processing and seafood markets is valued at nearly \$300 million. Additionally, the GDP from ocean-based tourism and recreation in the state totals nearly \$16.5 billion. Florida also generates millions of dollars in commercial fishing, including shrimp, mackerel, blue crab and swordfish. Furthermore, Florida boasts nearly 350,000 jobs in tourism and recreation and nearly 120,000 direct jobs in recreational and commercial fishing.

Additionally, the type of seismic air gun testing used to search for oil and gas is incredibly harmful and could injure or kill thousands of marine mammals and fish, including critically endangered species like the North Atlantic right whale, of which only about 455 remain. Seismic air guns fire dynamite-like blasts of compressed air 10 -12 seconds, 24 hours a day, for weeks and months at a time. These loud air gun blasts can be heard for many hundreds of miles in the ocean and as a result can drive whales to abandon habitats, cause them go silent, and cease foraging over vast areas. At shorter distances, it can cause permanent hearing loss, injury, and even death for whales, dolphins and fish. According to the Department of the Interior's (DOI) own estimates, the use of air guns would injure approximately 138,000 marine mammals and disrupt marine mammal feeding, calving, breeding, and other vital activities more than 13.5 million times.

We urge your administration to focus on ensuring the vitality of coastal economies along the Atlantic coast. We cannot put our ocean environment, beaches, marine resources, and coastal economies at risk.

We now know what a worst case scenario oil spill looks like. Another oil spill closer to Florida's coasts can irrevocably harm sea life, ecosystems, fisheries, beaches, tourism, public health and our coastal communities.

Again, we urge you to reconsider this proposal and refrain from permitting seismic air gun testing off the coast of Florida.

Sincerely,



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



Bill Nelson
U.S. Senate



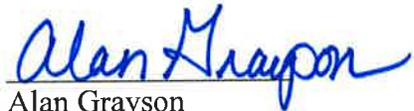
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Member of Congress



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