



State of New Jersey

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May 22, 2015

Honorable Robert L. Barchi, President
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
83 Somerset Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1281

Dear President Barchi:

We write today in regards to the planned seismic testing by Rutgers University, the Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory and the University of Texas this summer in the Atlantic Ocean off the New Jersey Shore. We strongly oppose this testing and respectfully request that you cancel the study or, at minimum, schedule it for outside the peak summer months and revise the plans to be less harmful to marine life.

The seismic blasts are not only a threat to New Jersey's environment resources, they can be disruptive and damaging to commercial and recreational fishing, which are extremely important to the state's economy, its tourism industry and our quality of life.

Rutgers is our State's Flagship University and should aspire to be a good state citizen by minimizing negative impacts to our residents, businesses and the environment. Rutgers is leading this study, so Rutgers can stop it.

As you know, on March 16, the New Jersey Senate passed Senate Resolution No. 72, a bipartisan resolution calling for the National Marine Fisheries Service within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to reject any proposal and cancel all plans relating to the performance of seismic testing in the Atlantic Ocean, which would be conducted about 15 miles from Barnegat Bay.

Unfortunately, the Fisheries Service allowed the plan to move forward by authorizing the marine mammal "takes" during the planned study. The authorization allows over 25 marine mammal

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species, six of which are endangered, to be subjected to harsh noise created from seismic airguns and three other acoustic blast technologies.

Seismic testing has the potential to seriously harm marine life. One such test that may be used is a multibeam echosounder (MBES), which has been implicated in the stranding of over 100 melon-headed whales off the coast of Madagascar. The testing area off the New Jersey Shore is a key habitat for squid and summer flounder, which are important local fisheries.

Additionally, the tests will negatively impact an area just beginning to recover from the damage caused by Superstorm Sandy and at a time when marine life continues to suffer from sea level rise, marine acidification and pollution. Conducting this testing in the "off-season" would lessen the negative impact on marine wildlife.

In March, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) determined that the project is inconsistent with the state's rules on Coastal Zone Management. In the determination, DEP cited foreseeable adverse impacts to fisheries, endangered or threatened wildlife, and to New Jersey's coastal resources.

New Jersey depends on a strong commercial and recreational fishing industry. Recreational fishing produces almost 10,000 jobs in the state, and Cape May and Wildwood are the second highest ranked commercial fishing port on the East Coast and fifth nationally.

Allowing for seismic surveys off the coast of New Jersey also sets a dangerous precedent for future efforts to explore offshore for oil and gas, something we have strongly opposed in the Mid-Atlantic region and will continue to strongly oppose off New Jersey. We are also concerned that the seismic surveying results could be used in the pursuit of opening up areas off New Jersey's coast for oil and gas exploration.

We recognize that scientific studies are important to better understanding climate change and its impacts. However, we are concerned that seismic activity during the peak summer season just miles off of New Jersey's coast not only has the potential to cause significant harm to marine life and habitat, but will threaten our coastal economy as well.

We respectfully request that you take immediate action to halt this study and re-assess whether it is worth the cost, and, if so, how it can be modified to cause less damage. We appreciate

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your time and attention to this matter and look forward to your response. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact our offices.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Sweeney
New Jersey Senate President

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress