

PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 25, 2014

Contact Clean Ocean Action:

Cindy Zipf (732) 872-0111 (o)

Lauren Townsend (215) 939-7621 (c)

www.CleanOceanAction.org

www.StopRutgersOceanBlasting.org

Feds DENY New Jersey's Right to Review Rutgers Ocean Blasting off Coast

Use Technicality to Thwart State's Concerns

Seismic Ship Heads North toward New Jersey –

Emergency Meeting on LBI on Wednesday, July 2nd at 5pm

Highlands, NJ—The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has denied New Jersey's request to review the [Rutgers University led seismic study off Barnegat Inlet](#) for agreement with state regulations. Under the Coastal Zone Management Act, the study could be stopped if the state's consistency review found foreseeable impacts on state resources. Although the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) submitted strong comments for its right to this review, which detailed threats to coastal resources and the economy, NOAA's denial argued the "timeliness" of the request and ignored the state's concerns. NOAA's response appears baseless given that the NJDEP contacted NOAA on several occasions while evaluating the proposal and was clearly concerned with the potential for harm to coastal resources.

"It is a lame technicality; we were all blindsided by this proposal and the state acted quickly once they were alerted to the study. We trust Governor Christie and the NJDEP will use all legal and state means available to stop this study," said Cindy Zipf, Executive Director of Clean Ocean Action. "The clock is ticking and this study must not go forward—especially now."

Captain Kevin Wark, from the commercial vessel Dana Christine, said, "No one has given us assurances that this testing isn't going to hurt commercial fishing; there have been no hearings or studies that tell us that this won't be harmful. I also find it hard to understand why there's no accountability about the possibility of damage to marine mammals when the commercial fishing industry is held to such high standards with regard to the health and safety of marine mammals."

In its correspondence with NOAA, the NJDEP stated, “Based on previous studies examining seismic surveys and fisheries disturbances, it is reasonably foreseeable that the proposed surveys will have an impact from fisheries distribution, movement, migration and spawning perspectives that will lead to direct and indirect negative consequences to NJ’s fishing industries.”

Clean Ocean Action has been tracking the Marcus G. Langseth, the vessel that will be conducting the seismic blasting, by checking its location twice a day on the website marinetraffic.com. Until around midnight on June 23rd, it was docked in Charleston, SC. Now it is on the move and heading north.

The study will be conducted off Barnegat Light to examine 60 million-year-old sediments for historical sea level changes; however, despite Rutgers’ claims, the study is being conducted during peak migration and/or breeding of whales, dolphins, turtles, fish, and shellfish. Divers are also at risk.

“The study would send seismic blasts of up to 250 decibels into the water every 5 seconds, 24 hours a day for 30 days, interfering with marine animal communication and movement. By way of comparison, impairment of human hearing begins after 30 seconds of exposure at 115 decibels. Marine animals are much more sensitive to sound than people are,” said Cassandra Ornell, Staff Scientist at Clean Ocean Action.

The imminent blasting of the ocean has commercial and recreational fishing leaders, divers, elected officials, marine mammal protectors and citizens who care about the health of New Jersey marine life very concerned. Governor Christie has been invited to attend an emergency town hall meeting at 5pm on Wednesday, July 2nd at the Barnegat Light Fire Company on Long Beach Island.

Marine life at risk includes:

- 26 marine mammal species, including 6 endangered whale species and other whales, dolphins, and seals, may be located in or moving through the study area. Seismic blasting can interfere with marine mammal movement, breathing, communication, and feeding, and can even cause hearing damage.
- 9 of the 16 most important offshore commercial fisheries are at their peaks in the summer months. Seismic blasts can cause fish and squid to scatter and impact catch rates.
- New Jersey offshore waters are host to five threatened or endangered sea turtle species. Sea turtles exposed to much lower sound levels than proposed in this study have shown significant behavioral impacts.

Clean Ocean Action is a non-profit, broad-based coalition of 135 conservation, environmental, fishing, boating, diving, student, surfing, women’s, business, service, and community groups, with a mission to improve the degraded water quality of the marine waters off the New Jersey/New York coast. COA has a decades-long history of science- and law-based advocacy for a clean, industry-free Atlantic Ocean.

###