

PRESS RELEASE



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Citizens Fight Back Against Federal Agency Plans to Open Atlantic Ocean for Big Oil Energy Management

Atlantic City, NJ – Elected officials, residents and environmental leaders are here today to voice their concerns with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) 5 year oil and gas drilling plan. The plan includes opening the Atlantic Ocean, from Georgia to Virginia, for offshore oil and gas leasing starting in 2017. Adding insults to the sea, BOEM's authorization for ocean blasting activities for oil and gas exploration may start as early as this summer. Instead of hosting a public hearing in affected coastal states, BOEM is conducting "meetings" with an "open house" type format.

In response, citizens dependent on a clean ocean are gathering and holding a rally for the opportunity for citizens to provide testimony about this proposal. Since there is no public testimony portion at the open house, groups expressed their opposition to the oil drilling plan and lack of public involvement, while standing beside a table of four "BOEM panelists" represented by brick walls. **As Cindy Zipf, Executive Director of Clean Ocean Action explains**, "Talking to BOEM is like talking to a brick wall. We have been fighting any oil and gas drilling in the Atlantic for 30 years. However, this federal agency has been trying for years to open this coast. Now they are moving forward with ocean blasting, drilling, and gutting due process by not holding hearings, which is why we are hosting our own."

Given the risks and threats of offshore drilling and large scale seismic testing, the public should have a right to voice their apprehensions regarding this proposal. Due to the Gulf Stream, a current that flows from the tip of Florida up the east coast, New Jersey's coast would be at great risk from any pollution or spills from offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean. Opening up this area to oil development and exploration could have devastating effects on our beaches, marine life, tourism, fisheries, and coastal economies. Expanding offshore drilling will move America away from conservation, efficiency, and renewable energy. Instead America will be moving towards a potentially catastrophic spill and the acceleration of climate change.

“The inclusion of the Atlantic Ocean in BOEM’s 2017-2022 five year draft plan poses a great threat to New Jersey’s economic and environmental health. The fact is, drilling in the Atlantic is a risk-reward proposition—all of the risk is put on the backs of our shore communities, and all of the reward goes to Big Oil. An oil spill in the Atlantic has the potential to cause significant and lasting hardship for New Jersey residents. I oppose, as I have from the day these plans were announced, any expansion of offshore oil and gas drilling, particularly any such efforts that would threaten New Jersey’s vibrant coastal communities,” **stated Senator Menendez.**

“As New Jersey continues to recover from the devastation of Superstorm Sandy, we simply cannot allow any proposal that risks further harm to New Jersey’s coastal communities. We have seen the impact that an offshore drilling disaster can have on business, recreation, and the environment. From Sandy Hook to Cape May, our miles of coastline are too valuable to put at risk,” **said Senator Booker.** “I’m proud to join the groups and concerned citizens today in calling on the administration to abandon its proposal to allow for offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean. I believe this change in policy is a tremendous mistake and puts our state's businesses, shore communities, and coastal resources at risk.”

“Drilling off the Atlantic Coast is the wrong approach that puts our New Jersey beaches at risk,” **said Congressman Pallone.** “We’ve seen that oil spills don’t respect state borders. An oil spill anywhere along the Atlantic Coast would cause severe environmental damage to fisheries, popular beaches and wildlife. The fact remains that opening up the Atlantic Ocean for fossil fuel development is unnecessary, poses a serious threat to our coastal communities, and is the wrong approach.”

"I stand in firm opposition to the federal government's plan to drill for oil off the Atlantic Coast. The administration's proposal puts at serious risk New Jersey's environmental infrastructure and billions of tourism dollars spent every year at the Jersey Shore. All it takes is one incident, like a BP Deepwater Horizon, to end tourism in an area for years. Tomorrow, I'll join with my colleagues in the Senate to introduce legislation strongly urging President Obama to withdraw his proposal to open the Atlantic Coast for oil and natural gas drilling. It's wrong for the environment, wrong for the shore, and wrong for New Jersey," **said Assemblyman Vince Mazzeo (D-Atlantic).**

“Our residents and local businesses depend on our clean ocean and pristine beaches to support our tourism economy, which last year generated over \$17 billion in the four counties that border the Atlantic Ocean,” **said Mayor of Stone Harbor Suzanne Walters.**

“Seismic airgun testing is an unconscionable method of locating oil and gas reserves in the Atlantic. Seismic airgun testing produces high-density blasts or vibrations that displace and disperse physical objects within the environment. The testing forces whales, most species of fish including shark and game fish, dolphins, porpoises, seals and sea turtles to relocate disrupting their normal patterns of feeding, mating and travel, resulting in ecological imbalance. With testing, the Atlantic coast will change "from an 'urban marine habitat' populated with commercial, military, and recreational noises to a 'marine industrial soundscape' saturated with the continuous roar of industrial equipment,” **said Mary Hamilton, Director of the Sandy Hook Sealife Foundation.**

Helen Henderson, Atlantic Coast Program Manager American Littoral Society states, "The citizens of New Jersey have spent decades working to return the ocean to a clean and healthy state. We stopped ocean dumping and cleaned up the water. There is simply too much at risk - both environmentally and economically - to drill off our coast. One spill could destroy our shore. We stand strongly opposed to this proposal and stress that we must not turn over our ocean to the oil industry."

“On April 6, 2009 Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar held a real hearing where the public could voice their opinions on oil drilling off New Jersey. On March 18, 2015 the Department of Interior no longer wants to have public hearings for the common man, but accepts only written comments. I helped conduct over 6 public hearings for the Atlantic States Marine Commission in the last year in New Jersey on fisheries issues and know how hearings should be conducted. We make a presentation, answer questions on the presentation and actively solicit oral comments from everyone present. This hearing" is a farce," **stated Tom Fote, Legislative Chairman of Jersey Coast Anglers Association & New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs.**

"Drilling off the Atlantic -- and putting the Jersey Shore at risk -- is a risky gamble we can't afford," **said Doug O'Malley, director of Environment New Jersey.**

"You can't drill your way out of the climate crisis, and doubling down on fossil fuels is diametrically opposed to President Obama's legacy on climate. The President needs to nix this foolhardy proposal."

“Drilling off of Virginia threatens New Jersey’s coasts. This proposal allows oil wells up to the Maryland border, which is less than 100 miles from our beaches. Given the prevailing currents, any spill there would not only threaten our beaches, but our tourism economy. This proposal is shortsighted because of the potential for a little bit of oil could jeopardize our coast, our fisheries and our tourism industry,” **said Jeff Tittel, Director of The New Jersey Sierra Club.** “New Jersey’s coastal economy is just starting to come back from Hurricane Sandy. We need to let BOEM know that not only is this proposal bad, but so is the process. We need off shore drilling, like we need another hurricane.”

"More than two years have passed and the Jersey shore is still recovering from Hurricane Sandy, a natural disaster. BOEM is putting us at risk for serious man-made disasters. Our state depends on clean ocean environments for tourism and business - this should not be jeopardized for oil when clean alternatives, such as offshore wind energy, are viable option," **Beth Kwart, Chair of the South Jersey Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation.**

"It's encouraging to see the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) holding this public meeting in Atlantic City—we hope the Administration will continue to seek and listen to public input throughout this process," **said Nancy Pyne, Grassroots Manager for the conservation group Oceana.** "BOEM's draft proposal threatens coastal communities and the livelihoods of future generations for decades to come. For the first time in history, New Jersey's commercial fishing, tourism and recreation economies will be at risk from offshore oil exploration, routine leaks and the looming risk of a BP Deepwater Horizon-like disaster on the East Coast. The oil industry is telling New Jersey communities to take all of this risk—for no reward."

Background:

For over 27 years, the Atlantic Ocean was spared oil and gas threats thanks to a long-standing bi-partisan moratorium. In 2008, the moratorium was lifted, and the Atlantic Ocean became vulnerable. BP's oil spill in 2010 proved why drilling in the ocean was bad for tourism and fishing and there was a short reprieve for drilling, but not for long. Shortly after, President Obama opened the Atlantic Ocean to harmful oil and gas exploration called seismic testing, and in 2015, announced plans to open the Atlantic to drilling beginning in 2017.

NJ's collective voice was strong in opposition, including nearly the entire congressional delegation, and every governor since Governor Tom Kean. This bi-partisan opposition had worked. New Jersey waters are not being considered for drilling or blasting for oil and gas. However, the ocean is connected and the impacts will affect New Jersey by way of harming shared resources such as marine life, polluting ocean waters with drilling, and spills.

Originally there was no meeting scheduled in New Jersey. Thanks to Senator Booker, Senator Menendez, and Congressman Pallone who wrote to BOEM requesting a New Jersey meeting resulting in this open house. It is important that a meeting is held in New Jersey, since oil and gas drilling off the coast of Virginia could impact New Jersey's coast and economy.