

PRESS RELEASE



****For Immediate Release****

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Attachment: COA coalition letter to NMFS

Contacts:

Tom Fote, Legislative Chair - Jersey Coast Anglers (732) 598-7669
Jennifer Cubias, Clean Ocean Action, Press Inquiries (732) 872-0111

Ocean Area off Barnegat Bay Targeted for Seismic Blast Testing This June

Marine Life at Risk

Many Questions Unanswered

Groups Request Extension to 30-day Comment Period and Public Hearing

Sandy Hook, NJ – Targeting the **National Marine Fisheries Service’s** (NMFS) proposed authorization permitting marine mammal “takes” during an oceanic seismic study 15 miles off Barnegat Bay this June, **Clean Ocean Action** (COA) and partner groups today requested a 60-day extension to the comment period and a public hearing in order to question the need for the study as well as NMFS’s decision to authorize harassment. The authorization allows over 25 marine mammal species, six of which are endangered, to be subjected to noise created from seismic airguns and three other acoustic blast technologies, all with known potential to harm marine life.

The study, conducted by **Columbia University’s Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory** (L-DEO) and **National Science Foundation** (NSF), in collaboration with the **University of Texas** and **Rutgers University**, proposes seismic testing of ocean sediment to expand scientific understanding of historical changes in sea level rise. COA, along with over 20 businesses, organizations and tribal groups requested the extension to the public comment period to evaluate research deficiencies and data gaps in the NMFS authorization. The proposed area of study off Barnegat Bay will directly blast 240 square miles and cause reverberations for miles further.

“COA has been fighting seismic testing for nearly 30 years because it can seriously harm marine life,” said Cindy Zipf, Executive Director of Clean Ocean Action. “We were shocked to see this authorization and find it seriously flawed. While we support

scientific research, there are many questions about the need for this study, especially in light of the grave risk to marine life in such a large area,” she added.

“Squid and summer flounder are very important fisheries and this is a key habitat area for them. It has been documented that marine life is impacted by seismic testing,” said Captain Jim Lovgren, Director at the Fisherman’s Dock Cooperative, Point Pleasant and fourth generation commercial fisherman. “What is the point of this study compared to the risks involved,” asked Lovgren.

For example, the multibeam echosounder (MBES), one of four sound producing technologies proposed for use in this study, has been implicated in a massive stranding of 100 melon-headed whales off Madagascar. A scientific panel investigation of the mass stranding determined the use of MBES was the most likely trigger. The investigation report concluded that future assessments and regulatory decisions should consider potential marine mammal behavioral responses from the use of similar MBES systems.

“Neither the NMFS proposed authorization nor the Environmental Assessment upon which the authorization is based discusses potential risks to marine life from multibeam echosounder use,” stated Cassandra Ornell, Staff Scientist at Clean Ocean Action.

The seismic study comes on the heels of decades-long environmental advocacy against and legislative refusal of seismic activities linked to offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean from New Jersey to Florida.

“The timing could not be worse,” said Tom Fote, Legislative Chair of the Jersey Coast Anglers. “Our community has had enough damage from Superstorm Sandy and everything else affecting our ocean: marine acidification, sea level rise, pollution pouring out from our bays in New Jersey. Over 220 dolphins washed up along our coasts last year; we don’t need something else that will lead to the killing of marine mammals and fish off the Jersey coast. This would be the perfect storm.”

There are several ways for community organizations and concerned citizens to get involved. Further details can be found at <http://cleanoceanaction.org>

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