

To: LWVLCF members

Re: Action Alert, Off Shore Drilling

Federal officials have opened the leasing of the Atlantic seacoast for off shore drilling again. Five Seismic blasting companies have applied for a one year permit for “incidental takings of marine mammals.” The government has shortened the process so that there is only a 30 day response period. Comments are due July 6.

The Environmental Action Team of the League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear is asking you to write one and hopefully two letters as follows.

First Letter:

Write: Jolie Harrison, Chief, Permits and Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Springs, MD 20910

DEADLINE: JULY 6, 2017

Tell her that the 5 applications for incidental takings of marine mammals during seismic blasting of the Atlantic Sea Coast for sea bottom surveys should be denied.

Background:

- Incidental takings means unintentional but expected harassment, capture or killing of a marine mammal. It is illegal without authorization. The federal register states, “ An authorization for incidental takings shall be granted if the National Marine Fisheries Service finds that the takings will have a negligible impact on the species or stock(s)...” Negligible impact has been defined by the NMFS as “an impact...that cannot be reasonably expected to, and is not reasonably likely to, adversely affect the species or stock through effects on annual rates of recruitment or survival.”
- Seismic Blasting surveying pounds the ocean with very intense air blasts (sound bursts) with up to a mile long rig to map the presence of oil and gas under the sea bottom. If these permits are allowed, the coastal ocean would be crisscrossed by 5 separate companies blasting the area. The blasting would occur 5 times. Sound carries farther in the water.

Reasons for denial:

Scientific studies show these air blasting sounds:

- a. Interfere with whale communication between adults and between mother and young (changes in intensity, frequency, repetition and duration of vocalizations).
- b. Disrupt the development, and behavior of whales (diving and surfacing patterns) .
- c. Drive prey fish and other sea life away from the area interfering with the food supply.
- d. Cause physiological reactions and injury: 1) hearing loss, which would interfere with the critical auditory communication essential to their survival as well as, 2) stress and tissue injury.

Endangered species live in this area. Federal Law requires that the taking must have “negligible impact on the species or stocks,” i.e., cannot affect “annual rates of recruitment or survival.” Not enough data has been collected to determine if the taking is negligible. Concerns include:

- The critically endangered North Atlantic Right Whale’s only habitat is the mid and south Atlantic Ocean.
- Other endangered marine species in the area include: Fin, Blue, Sei and Sperm whales.

The current **3 mile buffer zone does not protect** migratory cetaceans. The previous 50 mile buffer zone was eliminated.

Ask: What is the rush? Oil prices are low. There is little time for citizens to respond.

Ask yourself: Which would you rather have 3 miles from shore, oil rigs or windmills?

For further information, go to:

Don’t Drill NC (a consortium of persons, organizations and businesses opposed to off shore drilling): <http://dontdrillnc.org>

NC Coastal Federation: nccf@nccoast.org.

Second Letter

Write: Governor Roy Cooper

Phone 919-814-2000

Address: North Carolina Office of the Governor

20301 Mail Service Center

Raleigh, NC 27699-0301

E Mail: <https://governor.nc.gov/contact-governor-cooper>

Write or Call Governor Cooper. Tell him he needs to state emphatically to federal officials that off shore drilling is incompatible with our federally approved coastal management. Governors play an important role in the federal government's decision making on off shore drilling

Reasons:

Economics:

- It threatens coastal tourism, a major economic driver for the state. In 2015, tourism supported 211,490 jobs and brought 2.4 billion in revenue to the 10 coastal counties.
- Commercial and Recreational Fishing: Fishing industries generate 23,000 jobs.

Natural resources:

- Threatens the largest estuary on the Atlantic Coast (There are 2.5 million acres of spawning nursery grounds for fish and shell fish in NC.)
- Threatens beaches that provide habitats for 5 of the 7 endangered species of sea turtles.
- Seismic testing drives fish and mammals away and threatens endangered whales.

All NC Coastal Communities except two have opposed off shore drilling.

(Brunswick is one of the two).

If you must choose one letter to write, write the National Marine Services. Thanks for your help in this matter.

The Environment Action Team

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