

February 20, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Use the Best Available Science before Permitting Seismic Surveys for Offshore Oil and Gas in the Mid- and South Atlantic

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the following marine scientists and conservation biologists we urge you to use the best available science before permitting seismic surveys for offshore oil and gas in the mid- and south Atlantic. We recommend that you do not finalize the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) regarding seismic surveys in the mid- and south Atlantic until the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has completed new Marine Mammal Acoustic Guidelines. It is essential to incorporate these guidelines into this PEIS in order to accurately estimate auditory injuries and disturbances to marine mammals from proposed seismic surveys, so that this important information can guide the most appropriate mitigation measures.

NMFS released the first phase of the acoustic guidelines on December 27, 2013 for public comment, and the agency will be releasing the second phase regarding behavioral disturbances to marine mammals soon. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has classified the first phase of these guidelines as a “Highly Influential Scientific Assessment”— the most stringent possible ranking under OMB’s peer-review protocol. More than 15 years have passed since NMFS first began developing these criteria for auditory impacts, as well as criteria for acoustic disturbances. The newly published draft guidelines synthesize years of scientific research regarding the effects of anthropogenic sound on marine mammals. During the development of the guidelines NMFS has undergone a rigorous internal and external peer review process including consultation with issue experts, and the first phase is now undergoing public comment.

If the PEIS moves forward without the newly established acoustic guidelines it will be scientifically deficient and quickly outdated. It will fail to accurately assess the true scope of marine mammal impacts from proposed seismic surveys, which is a primary purpose of the PEIS. The mid- and south Atlantic is home to a diversity and abundance of marine mammals, including the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale which could be impacted by proposed seismic survey activity. We implore you to take this opportunity to integrate NMFS’ new Marine Mammal Acoustic Guidelines into the PEIS for proposed seismic survey activity in the mid- and south Atlantic.

Sincerely,

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