



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Mark Belton, Secretary
Joanne Throwe, Deputy Secretary

August 16, 2017

Ms. Kelly Hammerle
National Program Manager
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
45600 Woodland Road
Mailstop VAM-LD
Sterling, VA 20166

RE: 7/3/17 Federal Register Notice Request for Information and Comments on the Preparation of the 2019–2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program MAA10400 (82 FR 30886)

Dear Ms. Hammerle:

Maryland opposes opening up the Mid-Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) lease area for oil and gas exploration and development activities as part of the 2019–2024, 5-year OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program. From both an economic and environmental perspective, the Hogan administration is opposed to offshore oil and gas drilling off our coast and has serious concerns about seismic surveys and testing in the Atlantic Ocean.

Rich in natural resources, Maryland and its citizens and communities prosper from a multitude of economic opportunities that are dependent upon the continued health of our ocean and bay waters. Actions to pursue oil and gas development in the Atlantic Ocean would not only put our sensitive coastal and marine areas at risk and increase conflicts with existing ocean uses, but also jeopardize our fishing, maritime, recreational and tourism industries.

Approximately eight million visitors annually visit Ocean City – a year-round resort on Maryland’s ocean coast. Assateague Island National Seashore offers more than 37 miles of high-quality ocean beaches in Maryland and Virginia and is one of the few remaining undeveloped barrier island environments in the Mid-Atlantic region. It is also an important regional destination visited annually by more than 2.3 million people who spend more than \$98 million, support 1,300 jobs and whose visits result in a net economic benefit exceeding more than \$112 million a year¹.

Over the past several years Maryland has worked together with our Mid-Atlantic local, state, federal and tribal partners, as well as our citizens, to begin charting a future for our ocean that ensures a healthy ocean ecosystem and supports sustainable ocean uses. Maryland is concerned about the threat of oil spills and their direct and indirect effects on coastal and bay ecosystems and economies. These risks raise significant questions about the cost and benefit of pursuing oil and gas leasing in sensitive coastal environments. We urge you to exclude the Atlantic OCS lease areas from the 2019-2024 planning program.

¹ Cullinane Thomas, C., and L. Koontz. 2017. 2016 national park visitor spending effects: Economic contributions to local communities, states, and the nation. Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/EQD/NRR—2017/1421. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado.
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vsc.htm>

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the July 3, 2017 Federal Register notice (82 FR 30886) requesting comments on the preparation of a 2019–2024, 5-year OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program for all 26 OCS Planning Areas. You will find attached a series of technical comments that address our concerns about the potential impacts of oil and gas exploration and development on the marine, coastal and human environments. If you have any questions, please contact Catherine McCall, Acting Director of the Office for Coastal and Ocean Management. She may be reached by calling 410-260-8737 or by e-mail at catherine.mccall@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Belton", written in a cursive style.

Mark Belton
Secretary

Cc:

Matthew Fleming, Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Catherine McCall, Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Joseph Abe, Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Emily Vainieri, Office of the Attorney General
Elder Ghigiarelli, Maryland Department of the Environment

Attachments:

Technical Comments "MDCCommentsLetter_OilGas2019-2024_8.8.17"