United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 28, 2016

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

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing regarding potential geological and geophysical (G&G) activities related to oil and gas exploration in the Atlantic Ocean, including seismic airgun blasting. The process for providing permits for Atlantic G&G is currently underway, led by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM). We strongly urge your Administration to refrain from permitting this harmful seismic blasting that would cause serious negative impacts to marine mammals and commercial and recreational fisheries.

Last month, your Administration removed the proposed Atlantic lease sale from the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Proposed Program. This was a vital step to protect the Atlantic coast and East coast communities that rely on healthy ocean ecosystems. We appreciate your Administration listening to the millions of coastal citizens, businesses, and fishermen who spoke up to protect their coastal ways of life. Notwithstanding this decision, however, BOEM has indicated that it will proceed with the seismic permitting process, reviewing applications by industry to shoot tens of thousands of miles of seismic line during the first year of activity alone. With the Atlantic Ocean withdrawn from the Proposed Program, seismic airgun blasting is unnecessary and should not proceed.

Seismic airgun blasting for oil and natural gas is an extremely disruptive activity in the ocean. A significant body of peer-reviewed science demonstrates that seismic airgun blasting can cause the catch rates of some commercial fish species to plummet, displace fish over large areas, and broadly disrupt the feeding and breeding behaviors of whales and other marine life. Last year, a group of 75 marine scientists sharply criticized BOEM's 2014 decision to introduce seismic surveys to the Atlantic and cautioned that impacts on the region's fish and marine mammal populations would be "significant, long-lasting, and widespread."

Although a wide range of marine species will be negatively impacted by seismic airgun blasting, the North Atlantic right whale is particularly vulnerable. This species is one of the most endangered whales on the planet, with only approximately 500 individuals remaining. According to NOAA, stressors in the whales' East Coast range, including ship collisions, underwater noise, possible entanglements, contaminants, and climate and ecosystem change all pose a threat to the species' rate of population growth. Adding another stressor, seismic airgun blasting, could further stress these whales by disrupting essential behaviors and negatively impacting their health. Proposed locations for seismic activity include critical calving areas in coastal waters off the southeastern United States. The already profound cumulative effects of human activities on right whale health adds to the urgency of preventing seismic airgun blasting in the Atlantic to avoid a decline in population growth that could lead to extinction.

Opposition to seismic airgun blasting among coastal communities is widespread and growing. Of the 112 local resolutions passed to oppose offshore oil and gas development, 95 of these specifically oppose seismic airgun blasting. Coastal communities recognize that seismic airgun blasting is a grave threat to their way of life, including economies based heavily on fishing and tourism. Coastal opposition includes actions by the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the bodies responsible for managing many of the fisheries in the proposed area for seismic blasting. These Councils, which include

industry representatives, have formally amended their policies to request protection for fisheries and fish habitats from energy exploration and development activities for the species and areas managed by the Councils.

Although the Atlantic Ocean has been temporarily protected from oil and natural gas production, exploration in the form of seismic airgun blasting continues to threaten marine ecosystems and productive fisheries. We ask that you protect this important and productive area from unnecessary, long-lasting harm and halt consideration of all G&G oil and gas permits.

Sincerely,

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Bill Nelson
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Jeff Merkley
United States Senator

Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Al Franken
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Cc: Brian Deese, Senior Advisor to President Obama, The White House
Secretary Sally Jewell, U.S. Department of the Interior
Director Abigail Hopper, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration