

AGENDA NOTE - HRPDC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

ITEM #13: CORRESPONDENCE OF INTEREST

A. LETTER, DWIGHT L. FARMER TO JOHN FISHER

Attached is a letter from Dwight Farmer to John Fisher, DEQ, providing HRPDC staff comments on the request for scoping comments on Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Geological and Geophysical Exploration on the Mid- and South Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf.

Attachment 13-A

B. LETTER, SIERRA CLUB TO VIRGINIA BEACH HOTEL MOTEL ASSOCIATION

Attached is a letter from the Eileen Levandoski, Hampton Roads Conservation Coordinator for the Sierra Club, Virginia Chapter to Verne Burlage, President of the Virginia Beach Hotel Motel Association, requesting that the Association rescind its support for Virginia offshore drilling.

Attachment 13-B



April 29, 2010

Mr. John E. Fisher
Department of Environmental Quality
Office of Environmental Impact Review
Post Office Box 1105
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Re: PEIS Geological and Geophysical Scoping Comments DEQ #10-059F

Dear Mr. Fisher:

Pursuant to your request of April 2, 2010, the staff of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission is providing scoping comments for the pending development of the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for Geological and Geophysical Exploration on the Mid- and South Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf.

The majority of the exploration applications listed on the MMS website (<http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/offshore/atlocs/gandg.html>) show exploration areas that overlap with the Department of Defense VACAPES training area in Virginia's offshore waters. The HRPDC staff recommends that the Department of Defense be involved in the development of the PEIS so that conflicts between exploration activities and training activities are minimized. In addition, the significant commercial and military ship traffic approaching and departing the Virginia Capes area must be considered in the location and timing of exploration activities.

From an ecological perspective, one of the most significant issues is the presence of endangered North Atlantic Right Whales, sea turtles, and other marine mammals in Virginia's offshore waters. Exploration activities should be located and timed to avoid or minimize impacts to marine mammals. Also, exploration activities should be designed to minimize impacts on the ecologically diverse canyons off the Virginia coast.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide scoping comments for the PEIS. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Dwight Farmer
Executive Director/Secretary

MLJ/fh



April 20, 2010

Verne Burlage
President
Virginia Beach Hotel Motel Association
1023 Laskin Road, Suite 111
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Dear Mr. Burlage:

The Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club urges the Virginia Beach Hotel Motel Association to rescind its support for Virginia offshore drilling as expressed in your letter to Mayor Sessoms dated May 2009.

First of all, you need to be corrected in offering alleged presentations from the Virginia Coastal Energy Research Consortium (VCERC) to support your position that "exploration or extraction will have no adverse implications on the hospitality industry". VCERC is exclusively involved in the research and development surrounding algal biomass, wind and wave energy production. They have not made any such presentations, nor do they have the authority to do so.

Secondly, the information that you reviewed to support your position that oil and gas development "can be done in an environmentally responsible way" is mistaken for a number of reasons to include:

1. Information on the environment potentially impacted by offshore drilling is 30 years out of date.
2. Despite technological advances in drilling operations, spills still occur.
3. Offshore drilling causes chronic pollution to our coastal air and water.
4. Heavy industrialization of our coastal areas is a requirement of offshore drilling.

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Attachment 13-B

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5. Seismic activities done in exploration for oil and gas cause harm and even death to marine mammals and fish and have been proven to reduce commercial fishing catch.

Drilling has not occurred off our Atlantic coast for almost 30 years. Information on the possible effects of Atlantic drilling is thus "30 years out of date," as Interior Secretary Ken Salazar points out. Large data gaps exist when it comes to endangered and protected species, fish and fisheries, the biology of the ocean floor, the ecosystems found in Virginia's offshore ocean canyons and coral reefs, as well as the physical and geological oceanography. Any assertion that drilling "can be done in environmentally responsible way" is completely unsubstantiated and wrong.

Despite what drilling proponents contend, oil spills remain an inevitable "cost of doing business".

Just last August 2009 an oil rig off the Australian coast blew out and leaked over 400 barrels of oil per day into the ocean, eventually covering more than 9000 square miles (roughly the footprint size of New Jersey). Oil continued to gush out into the ocean for nearly three months before the well could be plugged and the spill brought under control. During that time, the rig itself caught fire.

The rig that failed was owned and operated by Seadrill, a major international offshore drilling contractor that operates a global fleet of 41 drilling units in 15 countries worldwide to include the U.S. Gulf Coast. The rig is new, technologically advanced equipment, built in 2007 and is highly touted by drilling advocates as "environmentally safe". This is the same equipment the oil industry is suggesting for use off our coast.

One spill, even a fraction of the size of the Australian spill, could ruin the state's tourism-driven economy and destroy some of the world's most-protected environmental areas to include the national treasure that is the Chesapeake Bay. Virginia's environmentally sensitive and economically important beaches could be forever damaged by just one large oil spill or by the routine pollution that accompanies offshore oil and gas drilling.

Drilling also threatens coastal beaches, beach communities and estuaries with its chronic spills and toxic discharges. Each year U.S. drilling operations send an average of 880,000 gallons of oil into the ocean. Drilling causes an average of 180,000 gallons per well of waste mud containing toxic metals being dumped into surrounding waters. Each drilling platform generates more than 50 tons of NOx, 11 tons of carbon monoxide, 8 tons of sulfur dioxide and 38 tons of volatile organic hydrocarbons every year. Offshore oil and gas development requires onshore infrastructure (pipelines, tanks, processing facilities) that

industrialize our coasts. Routine air and water pollution from offshore rigs, coupled with industrialization in sensitive coastal areas, are bound to undermine local economies.

Seismic surveys conducted during exploration cause physical injuries and even death to marine mammals. Strandings of whales on beaches are the most obvious sign of trauma caused by seismic activities. Much less obvious is the marine mammals whose compromised hearing makes them easy prey for predators. Altered fish behavior along with disruptions in the food web as a result of seismic activities has been proven to dramatically depress catch rates of various commercial species to include cod, haddock, and rockfish.

Burning more fossil fuels and causing the greater contribution to climate change cannot be the solution offered by a community such as Virginia Beach. Not only is the City one of the world's most vulnerable cities to sea-level rise in terms of assets exposed, but the impacts of climate change are dramatically felt in our shellfish markets as our ocean becomes more acidic.

According to a recent report by the Sierra Club and Environment America, the annual value of all coastal dependent businesses such as tourism and fishing in the Mid-Atlantic exceeds the annual value of oil and gas by a ratio of almost 4 to 1 - \$13.55 billion from sustainability activities versus \$3.7 billion from nonrenewable oil and gas extraction. These sustainable activities completely rely on clean beaches and healthy ocean waters. If we wish to preserve these highly lucrative sustainable activities and the economic value these activities produce, we must keep the nonrenewable activities like oil and gas production out of new areas of the ocean, like off the coast of Virginia.

We urge the VBHMA to not only rescind its support of drilling, but we also invite you to join the Sierra Club and Surfrider Foundation on June 26 in locking "Hands Across the Sand" along the Virginia Beach oceanfront in protest to offshore drilling.

People of all walks of life are coming together to draw a human line in the sand. "Hands Across the Sand" is a movement founded in Florida earlier this year when over 10,000 people on almost 80 beaches joined hands in protest to offshore drilling. This movement is not about politics; it is about protection of our shoreline, our waterways, our tourism, our coastal military missions and our valuable properties.

The reality that is offshore drilling has so far prompted 56 Florida cities, towns, counties, chambers of commerce, the Bay Defense Alliance and the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association to issue resolutions in opposition to Florida offshore drilling.

In hopes of both educating the Virginia Beach community to the harsh and ugly reality that is offshore drilling and to garner as wide and diverse of participants in our "Hands Across the Sand" event, key staff and volunteers from both Sierra Club and Surfrider Foundation will be doing outreach to the business community on May 10-14, 2010. We will gladly meet with members of the Virginia Beach Hotel Motel Association either individually or in small group settings.

Our precious Chesapeake Bay, our sensitive coastal wetlands, and our highly lucrative tourism and fishing industries are completely dependent on clean beaches and healthy ocean waters. We must appreciate the bounty we have in coastal Virginia and how much we stand to lose if oil drilling were to occur.

Very truly yours,



Eileen Levandoski
Hampton Roads Conservation Coordinator
Sierra Club, Virginia Chapter
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Virginia Beach, VA 23454
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cc: Virginia Beach City Council
Mayor's Alternative Energy Task Force (via email)
Congressman Glenn Nye
U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Jim Webb
Jack Hornbeck, Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce
Dwight Farmer, Hampton Roads Planning District Commission
Virginia Coastal Energy Research Consortium
Virginia Tourism Corporation
Virginia Beach Resort Advisory Commission
Warren D. Harris, Virginia Beach Economic Development
Barry Hawkins, Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association
Tom Griffin, Virginia GREEN (via email)