

October 6, 2022

Dear Mr. President and Secretary Haaland:

As scientists, we write to you, united in our concern about offshore drilling's contribution to the climate crisis and impact on marine ecosystems. The Biden-Harris administration's proposed National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program threatens to continue the status quo of dirty and dangerous drilling and spilling which our public waters and climate cannot afford. We ask you to release a final program with no scheduled offshore oil and gas drilling lease sales.

Our health and planet depend on a rapid transition to clean, renewable energy, and we should not be investing in new fossil fuel extraction. Offshore drilling is a threat to marine life and coastal economies that rely on a vibrant ocean.

New leases will not impact oil production for years to come and then only to a negligible degree a decade from now.¹ Oil companies already hold leases to millions of unused acres in the Gulf of Mexico.² There is no need to increase their stockpile. According to the International Energy Agency, it is possible to meet net zero carbon emissions goals by 2050 and abate the worst impacts of climate change, and that path requires no investment in developing new areas for oil and gas.³

Offshore drilling exacerbates the climate crisis.

Climate change threatens the health of our ocean.⁴ If we continue on our current path, the expected increases in temperature, increases in extreme weather, and rising sea levels will wreak havoc on coastal communities and put marine life at risk. These catastrophic impacts will displace people and cause suffering across the planet.^{5,6}

A policy to protect all unleased federal waters from offshore drilling in the United States could prevent over 19 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions as well as more than \$720 billion in damages to people, property, and the environment.⁷ We cannot afford more oil and gas drilling and its associated climate pollution if we are to reach our greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

Our coasts should be protected from another BP *Deepwater Horizon* catastrophe.

In 2010, the BP *Deepwater Horizon* exploded and spewed over 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.⁸ Fisheries closed, demand for Gulf seafood plummeted, and losses in the seafood industry are estimated at nearly \$1 billion.⁹ After the BP disaster, boating, fishing, and beach visits dropped across the region and the recreation industry lost more than \$500 million in revenue.^{10,11} Toxic oil destroyed wetlands and killed marine wildlife including commercially valuable fish. Lasting impacts from the spill continue to this day.

Last year, another oil disaster killed birds and fish off California’s coast. Fisheries were forced to close in the wake of an offshore pipeline rupture that spread oil across sandy beaches and vibrant wetlands.¹² We cannot allow private corporations to continue to extract offshore oil and gas and risk the health of our ocean. Simply put, where they drill, they spill.

Offshore oil drilling generates chronic pollution.

Coastal industrialization and pollution from offshore drilling threaten local communities. In addition to hundreds of oil spills each year, standard operating procedures for oil and gas extraction generate radioactive waste, polluted water, and sludge.^{13,14} More than 18 billion barrels of waste fluids from oil and gas extraction are produced annually in the United States.¹⁵ Moreover, communities of color are often disproportionately impacted by this environmental pollution.¹⁶

Ocean noise pollution from oil and gas exploration and other activities harms marine mammals by compromising vital behaviors—behaviors such as foraging, breeding, and nursing—on which marine mammals depend to survive and reproduce.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ Iconic populations of marine mammals living in areas targeted for more drilling remain threatened with extinction, including Rice’s whales, with only approximately 50 individuals remaining, in the Gulf of Mexico and beluga whales in Cook Inlet, Alaska.^{20,21}

Preventing new offshore drilling will protect coastal communities from devastating pollution, support healthy marine ecosystems, safeguard marine mammals, and encourage a clean energy future. The time for action is now.

Sincerely,

Affiliations of signatories are provided for purposes of identification only; signatories sign as individuals, not as representatives of their institutions.

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