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Committee:
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House of Representatives
State of South Carolina

June 10, 2019

Dan Burger
Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management
1362 McMillan Avenue, Suite 400,
Charleston, S.C., 29405

Dear Mr. Burger,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to WesternGeco's application for certification of consistency with South Carolina's Coastal Zone Management Program for plans to conduct seismic testing in the Atlantic off South Carolina's coast.

I represent South Carolina House District 108, which is a coastal district along Georgetown and Charleston counties. I've heard loud and clear from constituents that they do not want seismic testing or oil and gas drilling off our coast because of the detrimental effects of seismic air gun blasts to marine life and the very real threat of a drilling disaster and the resulting severe environmental and economic harm it would bring to our area.

All of the municipalities in the district – Pawleys Island, McClellanville, Awendaw and Mt. Pleasant – plus Georgetown County, have passed resolutions opposing seismic testing and offshore oil and gas drilling. According to media reports, all of the mayors of South Carolina coastal cities and towns have taken positions opposing seismic testing and offshore drilling.

The district I represent has beautiful beaches, bays, and estuaries that attract tourism and are also ecologically important. They provide vital habitat for marine life and birds, particularly for juvenile offshore fish that are vital to our commercial and recreational fisheries.

In the last year, commercial fishermen in ports adjacent to and in the district landed nearly 1 million pounds of snapper-grouper species and recreational fishermen along the South Carolina coast are estimated to have caught 18 million fish. Our commercial and recreational fishing industry cannot afford the harm seismic testing would bring to important fish species.

With state tourism producing as much as \$23 billion and providing one in ten South Carolinians with jobs, we cannot afford to risk harming such a major facet of our economy by allowing harmful seismic

testing or effectively playing Russian roulette with oil rigs off our coast. Sooner or later there will be a “bullet” in the gun chamber in the form of a major oil spill disaster.

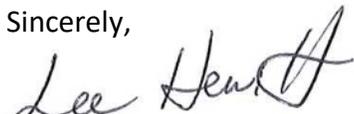
The following are some of the reasons why the WesternGeoco application should be denied:

- **The proposed seismic air gun blasting permit is inconsistent with South Carolina’s federally approved Coastal Zone Management Program**, which recognizes “[t]he coastal zone is rich in a variety of natural, commercial, recreational and industrial resources of immediate and potential value to the present and future well-being of the State.”
- **OCRM must consider the significance and impact on “destruction of endangered wildlife or vegetation or significant marine species”** when evaluating federal permits for consistency with South Carolina’s coastal zone management policies. Seismic air gun blasts will cause marine life destruction.
- **The seismic testing will result in undue harm to marine mammals like the endangered North Atlantic Right Whales.** It’s been proven that seismic air gun blasts risk serious injury or death to whales and dolphins. It is also known to disrupt the ability of whales and other marine species to feed, breed and conduct the most basic functions essential to survival over enormous distances.
- **Seismic air gun blasts would hurt fisheries.** During and after seismic blasting, catch rates of some commercially and recreationally important fish species have decreased substantially. Studies show that seismic testing could decrease catch rates by as much as 80 percent.
- **Seismic air gun blasts would hurt sea turtle populations.** South Carolina is a critical area for sea turtles, which are sensitive to noise. Seismic air gun blasting would interfere with their nesting.
- **Last month the General Assembly approved a ban on approval of seismic testing and offshore oil drilling infrastructure permits by the state or local governments** that was included as a provision in the budget that was passed. I think it’s clear the legislature’s intent is to prevent seismic testing and oil drilling activities off our coast.

DHEC should find the proposed WesternGeco permit inconsistent with the coastal management program because of its impact on natural resources and the economic impact on South Carolina.

Again, on behalf of my constituents, I oppose the WesternGeco application certification of consistency with South Carolina’s Coastal Zone Management Program for plans to conduct seismic testing in the Atlantic off South Carolina’s coast.

Sincerely,



Rep. Lee Hewitt