

June 8, 2020

Dear Mr. President and Members of Congress:

As scientists, we write to you, united in our concern over the proposed expansion of offshore oil and gas drilling in U.S. waters. Offshore drilling represents a significant threat to marine life and coastal economies that rely on a vibrant ocean. Because our health and planet depend on a rapid transition to clean, renewable energy, we should not be investing in new fossil fuel extraction. On World Oceans Day, we call on you to protect our coasts and halt these efforts to expand offshore drilling.

**Offshore drilling fuels climate change, which threatens our health and livelihoods.**

Among the greatest threats to our oceans are rising temperatures and acidity, caused largely by emissions from burning fossil fuels.<sup>1</sup> 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. These catastrophic impacts will displace people and create geopolitical instability.<sup>2,3</sup>

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

In 2010, the BP *Deepwater Horizon* exploded, spewing over 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Fisheries closed and demand for Gulf seafood plummeted.<sup>5</sup> The loss to the seafood industry is estimated at nearly \$1 billion.<sup>5</sup> After the BP disaster, boating, fishing and beach visits dropped across the region, and the recreation industry lost more than \$500 million in revenue.<sup>6,7</sup> Toxic oil ruined wetlands and killed marine wildlife including commercially valuable fish. Lasting impacts from the spill continue to this day. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA):<sup>8</sup>

- At least 1,300 miles of Gulf shoreline were oiled, including wetlands which protect coastlines during storms and serve as nurseries for many fish and shellfish.
- Hundreds of fish species were exposed to oil. Red snapper, bluefin tuna and spotted seatrout are among those known to be impacted. Trillions of larval fish and invertebrates were killed.
- Bottlenose dolphins in Barataria Bay were decimated. Following the spill, deaths rose by 35% and incidence of failed pregnancies by 46% compared with a healthy population.
- Oil exposure resulted in up to a 7% decline in the population of endangered sperm whales in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Nearly half the critically endangered Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whales were impacted by oil, and the population dropped by 22%.
- The spill killed up to 170,000 sea turtles in the northern Gulf of Mexico, home to five endangered or threatened sea turtle species.

**Offshore oil drilling generates chronic pollution in the ocean and on land.**

Where offshore drilling exists today, the associated coastal industrialization and pollution threaten local communities. In addition to the hundreds of accidental spills each year, standard operating procedures for oil and gas extraction generate waste, including radioactive materials, polluted water, sludge and sediments.<sup>9,10</sup> More than 18 billion barrels of waste fluids from oil and gas production are produced annually in the United States.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, communities of color are often disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution, with African Americans exposed to 38% more polluted air than Caucasian Americans and 75% more likely to live in communities neighboring industrial sites.<sup>12</sup>

The Gulf of Mexico already contains enough pipeline to encircle the Earth – over 26,000 miles – and with each new piece of oil infrastructure our communities and environment face additional threats.<sup>13</sup> Further opening federal waters to offshore drilling poses an unacceptable risk of serious harm to marine life and coastal communities.

Respectfully, Mr. President, we urge you to protect our coasts from expanded offshore drilling in the next National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program. We call on Congress to protect our coasts by passing legislation to immediately freeze the footprint of offshore drilling and to prevent further expansion of this dangerous industry.

Sincerely,

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#### Sources:

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