



HENRY McMASTER  
GOVERNOR

January 16, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

I am writing to follow up on our telephone conversation of January 11, 2018, concerning the Administration's recent offshore drilling considerations. On behalf of the State of South Carolina, I am requesting an exclusion from the National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

As the demand for power has grown, so too has the need for increased production from a variety of other sources, such as nuclear, solar, wind, and hydropower. Arguments that offshore drilling for oil and gas is needed to meet this increase in demand are salient—but I am certain that this is not in South Carolina's best interest. Simply put: our coastline is not an industrial working coastline as in some other states. It is just the opposite.

Our beaches, sea islands, and marshes are among the most beautiful in the nation. Many are uninhabited and off-limits for development. This unspoiled beauty draws 28.5 million people to South Carolina each year. Our 187-mile coastline and 2,876 miles of coastal shoreline drive a \$20 billion tourism industry—one of our largest industries. Our seaside communities like Myrtle Beach, Charleston, Hilton Head, and Beaufort depend on a pristine coastline that brings visitors here from all over the globe. Such reliance means that we cannot afford to accept the risk of adverse environmental impacts attendant to offshore drilling.

Every city and town council along the South Carolina coastline has voted to oppose seismic testing and drilling, and I agree with them. Our commercial fishing industry enjoys a vibrant

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offshore ecosystem. The habitat disruption and other impacts that marine life could suffer due to seismic testing are simply not worth whatever benefit our state might see from placing oil rigs offshore.

I am also concerned about the risks associated with the construction of industrialized infrastructure required to support offshore drilling operations. Massive refineries, gas storage tanks, and other large-scale maintenance and operating facilities are not economically compatible either with existing coastal residential and resort development or with our protected sea islands, estuaries, and tidal marsh refuges.

As governor, it is my duty to future generations to protect our most precious assets and to make decisions consistent with South Carolina's strong conservation ethos. We have 47 state parks, two national forests, and the Congaree National Park—the largest intact expanse of old growth bottomland hardwood forest remaining in the southeastern United States. Moreover, South Carolina's Lowcountry region is home to four National Wildlife Refuges—Cape Romain, Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin, Santee, and Waccamaw—which collectively encompass over 115,000 acres of coastal barrier islands, salt marsh ecosystems, blackwater rivers, and forested wetlands. We also have the South Carolina Conservation Bank, which exists to protect and sustain our natural capital from development incompatible with our incomparable beauty. And we are making a substantial push for more solar energy—a clean and comparatively harmless alternative energy source.

Perhaps most alarming is the fact that South Carolina sits in the middle of “Hurricane Alley,” and we are regularly in the path of hurricanes, tropical storms, and other severe aquatic weather events. In September of 2017, Hurricane Irma had a tremendous impact on our coastline, flooding city streets in Beaufort and Charleston. A year prior, Hurricane Matthew did the same. We all remember Hurricane Hugo, which affected 1.8 million people, caused \$6.5 billion in damages, and resulted in the loss of 35 lives. In 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita destroyed 115 oil platforms and damaged 52 others in the Gulf of Mexico. As a state which regularly faces such threats, we cannot countenance the addition of even more risk by placing offshore drilling platforms in the path of these storms.

I ask that you—along with my good friend President Donald J. Trump—take these considerations into account as you implement future offshore drilling plans.

Yours very truly,



Henry McMaster