



August 7, 2015

The Honorable William D. Sessoms, Jr., Mayor
Municipal Center, Building 1
2401 Courthouse Drive
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

RE: 2017-2022 BOEM Off-shore Oil and Gas Leasing Program for the Mid-Atlantic Coast including the Commonwealth of Virginia

Dear Mayor Sessoms:

Lynnhaven River NOW has been a respected voice for our Virginia Beach natural resources for thirteen years. The recent spill in Santa Barbara, California and the concerns expressed by the Resort Advisory Commission, the Virginia Beach Restaurant Association, and the Virginia Beach Hotel Association have led the Board of Directors of Lynnhaven River NOW to consider the prospect of drilling for gas and oil off our coasts and the potential for a spill off the coast of Virginia or associated with the on-shore infrastructure required to support off-shore drilling.

The Lynnhaven River NOW Board of Directors has voted to oppose drilling for gas and oil off our Virginia Coast and hopes that the Virginia Beach City Council will re-consider its position on off-shore oil and gas exploration.

There were many considerations that influenced our decision. The City has made a big investment in the resort area and keeping our beaches clean. We have the opportunity to expand on the new *Keep It Beachy Clean* initiative and market our city as the cleanest tourist destination on the East Coast. Tourism is a major component of our economy and could be devastated by a spill related to oil and gas exploration off our coast.

But the risk is not limited to a disaster. More importantly, exploration with seismic blasting, contamination from drilling, routine leaks of toxic drilling fluids, construction of pipelines storage facilities and refineries, routine discharges permitted by the EPA, all damage wildlife, water quality, and the landscape.

Oil and gas are toxic to blue crab larvae, oysters, and many species of finfish and shellfish. A decline in these populations will have a detrimental effect on our commercial fishing industry and recreational fishing as well as our local restaurants, seafood markets and wholesale seafood businesses. The oyster harvest in the Gulf is still 1/3 of the harvest numbers before the BP disaster. In addition, oil and gas destroy wetlands and all of the species that depend on them. Destruction of wetlands also makes our shorelines more vulnerable to erosion and flooding.

Cleaning up a spill is difficult, expensive and often only minimally effective. Areas affected by the spill remain impacted for decades after the incident. Even without a major spill, cleaning up the routine production oil discharges is limited and drilling fluids, lubricants, and produced waters pumped into wells can create their own pollution problems.

We have all worked hard to restore and protect our natural resources in Virginia Beach. We appreciate that clean water, local seafood, and clean beaches are a big part of our quality of life and our economy and we thank you for your leadership and vision in this regard over the years. We do not want to see all that has been accomplished put at risk for oil and gas exploration.

Thank you for considering our concerns as you deliberate on Virginia Beach's position on off-shore drilling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Karen W. Forget".

Karen W. Forget, Executive Director
On Behalf of the Lynnhaven River NOW Board of Directors

Mr. Andrew Fine
Mr. Harry Lester
Ms. Mary Reid Barrow
Ms. Lillie Gilbert
Mr. Brent James
Mr. Richard Serpe
Mr. Robert Wells
Mr. Robert Miller
Ms. Susan French
Ms. Marina Liacouras
Mr. Steve Herbert
Ms. Cathy Maston
Ms. Karen Forget