

**EXAMING THE FUTURE IMPACTS OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S OFFSHORE ENERGY
PLAN**

**TESTAMONY OF
EMILIE F. SWEARINGEN, COMMISSIONER
TOWN OF KURE BEACH, NORTH CAROLINA
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES
APRIL 15, 2015**

Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Lowenthal and members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. My name is Emilie Swearingen. I am a member of the Kure Beach Town Council. We're a small community located on an island between the Atlantic Ocean and the Cape Fear River. We have approximately 2,000 year-round residents and anywhere between 400,000 and 700,000 visitors every year. I am NOT here today to speak on behalf of our Town Council, but rather on behalf of the residents of Kure Beach, our tourists, our fishermen, our seafood industry and small businesses, and everyone in this country who cares about the future of our coastal communities and our quality of life.

Most of you have probably never been to Kure Beach. About a half-dozen residents occasionally show up for our monthly Council meetings; but on January 27, 2014, more than 300 showed up to protest our mayor's position in support of seismic testing and East Coast drilling. That night Kure Beach became ground zero for these issues. Since that night, the opposition has been mounting up and down the coast. More than 300 national, state and local elected officials have taken a public stance against seismic testing and offshore drilling, including more than 50 coastal towns that passed resolutions in opposition or voicing their concern. Copies of the letters and resolutions can be found in Oceana's grassroots "Coastal Resolution Toolkit." <http://usa.oceana.org/seismic-airgun-testing/coastal-resolution-toolkit>

You know those public meetings the Bureau of Energy Management (BOEM) held over the past few months. Attendance on the east coast exceeded 1,800. North Carolina, of course, had the highest attendance! In addition, more than half a million citizens in this country have submitted comments directly to BOEM opposing the inclusion of the Atlantic and Arctic in the Five Year Plan.

So...why are so many of your constituents concerned? Like many of the communities on the East and West Coast, tourism drives our economy.

Our two little towns on Pleasure Island, Kure and Carolina Beaches, generate more than \$124 million a year in beach expenditures. Direct seafood processing and packing on our little island generate almost \$5 million; and our for-hire fisheries generate almost \$6 million. Tourism is the largest industry in our county and one of the largest industries in the state.

Oceana's report, *An Economic Analysis of Offshore Drilling and Wind Energy in the Atlantic*, found that "offshore oil and gas development along the Atlantic could put at risk nearly 1.4 million jobs and over \$95 billion in gross domestic product that rely on healthy ocean ecosystems, mainly through fishing, tourism and recreation.

But it's not just about our economy.

I understand the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster killed or injured more than 25,000 dolphins and whales in the Gulf, plus tens of thousands of sea turtles. It also killed blackfin and bluefin tuna, blue marlin, mahi-mahi, sailfish, red snapper; and killed at least 700,000 birds. More than 100 species were affected, including one-third of all laughing gulls in the Gulf region and 12 percent of the Gulf's brown pelicans, which had just been removed from the endangered species list.

More than 1,000 miles of shoreline from Texas to Florida were contaminated, and many of these areas are still devastated by oil that may be hidden under sand until exposed by storms...storms like we have every year on the East Coast.

But the damage went far beyond the Gulf, according to Environment America. "Migratory birds, poisoned by oil, carried toxic chemicals across the country. As far away as Minnesota, white pelicans laid oil-contaminated eggs in their breeding grounds after returning home from the Gulf. In Tennessee evaporation from the oil created a cloud of minuscule airborne tarballs exposing local residents to pollutants linked to heart and lung disease."

Cynthia Sarthou, Exec. Director at Gulf Restoration Network, reported that even now, five years after the disaster, "Almost a mile of Louisiana's coast is still considered heavily oiled... The dolphins are dying, tar mats as big as 2,000 pounds are affecting beach communities 100 miles away, and lucrative coastal businesses and industries have lost millions of dollars and continue to struggle today."

Spilled oil is impossible to clean up entirely. What remains stays in the environment, causing harm for years. But it's not just the disasters we're concerned about or even the hundreds of smaller spills that go on throughout the year. There continues to be consequences from another source: industrialization. This is NOT an issue many of our residents are aware of.

To quote South Carolina State Senator Chip Campsen, a Republican and Isle of Palms resident, "This perspective is rarely raised and is not contingent upon an improbable catastrophic event, such as an oil spill, to impact our coast. If we embrace offshore drilling in South Carolina this factor will impact our coast definitively and continuously.

"Let me explain...I have observed firsthand the land-based infrastructure necessary to support offshore drilling. It is not a pretty sight. It is extensive, dirty and highly industrial. There simply is no place on South Carolina's coast appropriate for this kind of industrialization. Our coast is dominated by residential and resort development, wildlife and extensive protected ecosystems..."

Well, Congressmen (and women) there is no place for such industrialization on North Carolina's coast either.

Now I'm going to jump to the other end of the world for a minute. A couple of months ago I had an opportunity to visit Antarctica. It is the most pristine, most beautiful place in the world. While there, I thought about another pristine area, the Arctic, and the proposed drilling in the Arctic Ocean. What a tragedy it would be to destroy that part of our planet. The areas in the Arctic Ocean off the north coast of Alaska support very vibrant communities, iconic wildlife, and some of the last wild places that are relatively untouched by industrial development. The healthy waters are home to walrus, whales, seals,

polar bears, and other wildlife species. These important resources are a part of a way of life practiced in those coastal communities for millennia. To destroy all of that would be a travesty for the entire world.

Citizens living and working on our coasts have a right to decide for themselves if they want to allow drilling off their shores. Please...listen to the people in this country who are begging you not to destroy their quality of life.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify today.