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CONSERVATION VOTERS • MASSACHUSETTS LEAGUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL VOTERS MICHIGAN
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NEBRASKA RESOURCES COUNCIL • WHALE AND DOLPHIN CONSERVATION SOCIETY
WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

May 3, 2010

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our organizations, and the millions of members they represent, we are writing you today to urge the United States Senate to reconsider any plans to include expanded offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling in any legislation. In light of the events surrounding the *Deepwater Horizon* rig in the Gulf of Mexico, our organizations urge you to oppose efforts to expand offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling off of our coasts. Expanding exploration and drilling into previously protected and remote areas is unacceptable when it is clear that we are not

capable of responding to oil spills in a timely manner. The Senate faces a choice between leading America forward in a new clean energy economy or holding America back by preserving the failed energy policies of the past. This human and environmental catastrophe is proof positive that we must end our addiction to oil, enact a firm limit on carbon pollution, and ensure this type of disaster never happens again.

What began with the apparent tragic loss of 11 lives on April 21, 2010 now has the potential to be one of the worst environmental disasters in U.S. history. The unfolding catastrophe clearly illustrates that offshore drilling is an inherently dangerous, risky, and dirty business. Furthermore, these events raise numerous questions about the safety and environmental safeguards that are intended to protect our coastlines. If we cannot contain an oil spill in the very temperate Gulf of Mexico, how can we have any faith that a similar disaster does not await the "exploratory" drilling currently planned for the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas in the extreme conditions of the Arctic Ocean where we already know technology does not exist to clean up a spill in icy water.

Currently, the oil slick resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster continues to grow, posing hazards to marine wildlife. The slick of toxic oil has made landfall on the coastline of Louisiana and threatens the coasts of Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Exposure to the oil will likely have devastating impacts for coastal and marine wildlife and commercial and recreational fisheries.

Oil can persist in the environment long after a spill. This prolonged exposure to oil could result in major impacts on the coastal economies of the Gulf region. Gulf of Mexico fisheries are among the most productive in the world. In 2008, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service, the commercial fish and shellfish harvest from the five U.S. Gulf states was estimated to be 1.3 billion pounds valued at \$661 million. The Gulf also contains four of the top seven fishing ports in the nation by landed weight. The Gulf of Mexico has eight of the top 20 fishing ports in the nation by dollar value of landings.

Accidents happen, and they will continue to happen in the future. Any expanded offshore exploration and drilling should be off the table. Instead, legislation should focus on emphasizing development of carbon-free energy technologies, including offshore and land-based wind power and solar power, consistent with the protection of wildlife and ecosystems, and the development of a meaningful national renewable electricity standard.

Provisions creating new incentives (such as state revenue sharing) or reduced safeguards for expanded offshore drilling are simply not acceptable. The energy bill reported by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the American Clean Energy Leadership Act (ACELA) of 2009, reverses the bipartisan agreement reached in the 2006 Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA). The language would allow drilling within 10 miles of Pensacola, and shrink the current 125-mile-wide buffer elsewhere along Florida's West Coast to 45 miles. Clearly, an accident similar to the *Deepwater Horizon* would devastate Florida's coast regardless of buffers provided in the bill. We oppose inclusion of any such provisions in legislation considered by this Congress.

The numbers don't lie. There is not enough oil off of our shores to make America energy independent or to reduce gas prices. But, clearly there is enough to damage ocean and coastal ecosystems and billion-dollar coastal economies. Instead of expanding offshore oil drilling, responsible climate legislation needs to focus on innovation and investment in clean, renewable, carbon-free energy that creates jobs and protects our coastal economies and ecosystems.

The Senate has a profound responsibility to build a clean energy future for our nation without sacrificing our oceans and coasts in the process. Now is the time for strong clean energy and climate policy. It is up to you to ensure that we put the United States on the path to economic, environmental and national security.

Sincerely,

Oceana
1 Sky
350.org
Alaska Wilderness League
Alaska's Big Village Network
Animal Welfare Institute
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Water Advocacy
Clean Ocean Action
Climate Solutions
Conservation Law Foundation
Cook Inletkeeper
Credo Action
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Environment America
Environment Arizona
Environment California
Environment Colorado
Environment Connecticut
Environment Florida
Environment Georgia
Environment Illinois
Environment Iowa
Environment Maine
Environment Maryland
Environment Massachusetts
Environment Michigan
Environment Minnesota
Environment Montana
Environment Nevada
Environment New Jersey
Environment New Mexico
Environment New York
Environment North Carolina
Environment Ohio
Environment Oregon
Penn Environment
Environment Rhode Island
Environment Texas
Environment Virginia

Environment Washington
Wisconsin Environment
Environment and Energy Study Institute
Environmental Caucus of the California Democratic Party
Friends of the Earth
Greenpeace USA
Green For All
Gulf Coast Environmental Defense
International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Forum on Globalization
League of Conservation Voters
Alaska Conservation Voters
Conservation Alabama
Arizona League of Conservation Voters
California League of Conservation Voters
Colorado Conservation Voters
Connecticut League of Conservation Voters
Florida Conservation Alliance
Georgia Conservation Voters
Conservation Voters for Idaho
Maine League of Conservation Voters
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Massachusetts League of Environmental Voters
Michigan League of Conservation Voters
Conservation Minnesota
Missouri Votes Conservation
Montana Conservation Voters
Nevada Conservation League
Oregon League of Conservation Voters
Conservation Voters New Mexico
Conservation Council of North Carolina
Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania
Conservation Voters of South Carolina
Tennessee Conservation Voters
Texas League of Conservation Voters
Vermont League of Conservation Voters
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Washington Conservation Voters
Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters
Wyoming Conservation Voters
League of Women Voters
Marine Fish Conservation Network
MoveOn.org
Montana Audubon
Natural Resources Defense Council
National Audubon Society
Northern Alaska Environmental Center
Ocean Champions
Ocean Conservation Research
Oil Change International
Pacific Environment

Physicians for Social Responsibility
Planning and Conservation League
Progress Florida
Redoil
Safe Climate Campaign
Sierra Club
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Southern Environmental Law Center
Spirit of the Sage Council
Sport Fishing Magazine
Surfrider Foundation
The Habitat Trust for Wildlife
The Wilderness Society
Waterkeeper Alliance
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
Western Nebraska Resources Council.
World Wildlife Fund