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NEBRASKA RESOURCES COUNCIL • WHALE AND DOLPHIN CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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,

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1 Sky  
350.org  
Alaska Wilderness League  
Animal Welfare Institute  
Center for Biological Diversity

Clean Ocean Action  
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  
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Environment Washington  
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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  
League of Women Voters  
Marine Fish Conservation Network  
MoveOn.org  
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National Audubon Society  
Northern Alaska Environmental Center  
Ocean Champions

Ocean Conservation Research  
Oil Change International  
Pacific Environment  
Redoil  
Safe Climate Campaign  
Sierra Club  
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Southern Environmental Law Center  
Spirit of the Sage Council  
Surfrider Foundation  
The Habitat Trust for Wildlife  
The Wilderness Society  
Waterkeeper Alliance  
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society  
Western Nebraska Resources Council.