



April 15, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Submitted electronically via energyreview@ios.doi.gov

RE: Oil and Gas Leasing Program Review

Dear Secretary Haaland:

The National Ocean Policy Coalition (“Coalition”) is pleased to offer comments on the pause on oil and gas leasing activity directed by Section 208 of the President’s January 27, 2021 Executive Order on “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,”¹ as it pertains to leasing in federal waters.

The Coalition is an organization of diverse interests representing sectors and entities that support the development and implementation of sound, balanced ocean policies that recognize and enhance the critical role that our oceans, coastal areas, Great Lakes, and marine and terrestrial ecosystems play in our nation’s economy, national security, culture, health, and well-being while conserving the natural resources and marine habitat of our ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes regions for current and future generations. Coalition members span the Blue Economy and include interests ranging from fishing and energy to waterborne transportation and beyond that depend on ocean access to provide the nation with economic and societal benefits.

The Coalition urges the Interior Department to expeditiously lift the pause on leasing activity in federal waters. The Gulf of Mexico is a casebook example of how commercial and recreational interests can thrive alongside one another and support both a healthy economy and environment. In addition to accounting for nearly 20% of the nation’s oil production,² the Gulf of Mexico provides over 40% of domestic seafood.³ Underscoring the multiple use management approach that has served the Gulf of Mexico so well, activities including fishing and energy take place in the vicinity of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, a diving paradise teeming with coral.

¹ See January 27, 2021 Executive Order on “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,” accessible at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>.

² See Gulf of Mexico Fact Sheet, U.S. Energy Information Administration, accessible at https://www.eia.gov/special/gulf_of_mexico/.

³ See Gulf of Mexico, Environmental Defense Fund, accessible at <https://www.edf.org/oceans/gulf-mexico#:~:text=Working%20with%20fishermen%2C%20chefs%20and,tourism%20industries%20across%20five%20states.>



Moreover, Gulf of Mexico leasing activity provides the nation and states with significant funding for important conservation and restoration activities that provide societal and recreational benefits in both terrestrial and marine environments, with nearly \$700 million distributed in FY 2020.⁴

Lifting the pause on leasing in federal waters will help ensure that regions such as the Gulf of Mexico -- and the nation overall -- continue to benefit from the economic and environmental benefits associated with offshore energy lease sales, and will support the multiple use management approaches that have served the country well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Belcher", is placed over a light gray rectangular background.

Jack Belcher
Managing Director

⁴ See "Interior Disburses Nearly \$249 Million to Gulf States for Coastal Conservation, Restoration and Hurricane Protection Programs," U.S. Interior Department Press Release, Mar. 30, 2021, accessible at <https://www.doi.gov/news/interior-disburses-nearly-249-million-gulf-states-coastal-conservation-restoration-and>.