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December 10, 2019

Dear Representative:

We urge you to vote “no” on the Johnson (R-LA) amendment to H.R. 729, the Coastal and Great Lakes Communities Enhancement Act, which is on the House floor today. This amendment would support dirty and dangerous offshore oil drilling and harm marine mammals, like whales and dolphins.

**This amendment contains the text of H.R. 3424, the Streamlining Environmental Approvals (SEA Act), which would gut core provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to fast-track harmful seismic airgun blasting and other industrial uses of the ocean. The amendment clearly reflects the wish list of companies seeking to conduct controversial seismic airgun surveys for oil and gas deposits in the Atlantic Ocean, which is strongly opposed by coastal communities.**

Seismic airgun blasting in search of offshore oil favors the oil and gas industry over protecting coastal communities and marine wildlife. Seismic airgun arrays create one of the loudest manmade sounds in the ocean. Noise from airguns can disturb, injure or kill marine animals ranging from zooplankton, the base of the food web, to commercially important fish species, sea turtles, and large whales. According to the government’s own estimates, seismic airgun blasting in the Atlantic Ocean will injure and disturb marine mammals, like whales and dolphins, hundreds of thousands of times.

Seismic airgun blasting is the first step towards a future of unwanted offshore drilling in the Atlantic Ocean. Opposition to seismic surveys in the Atlantic is bipartisan and widespread, including more than 280 East Coast municipalities and an alliance representing over 43,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families. Ten East Coast states joined a lawsuit challenging the Trump administration’s 2018 approvals of five seismic blasting authorizations.

The Johnson amendment would repeal protections that lie at the heart of the MMPA, our nation’s commitment to the conservation of marine mammals. As human uses of the ocean—shipping, fishing,

energy development, defense, mining and tourism—expand, the need to prevent and mitigate harmful impacts to marine mammals is even greater now than when the MMPA was signed into law by President Richard Nixon.

Specifically, the bill would gravely weaken the legal standards for issuing Incidental Harassment Authorizations (IHAs), prevent agency scientists from requiring almost any kind of mitigation of harm to marine mammals, sharply limit monitoring of impacts, and impose a system of tight deadlines and automatic permit approvals that would make it difficult, if not impossible, for scientists to provide any meaningful review of potentially harmful activities.

The negative consequences of these changes for marine mammal conservation would be profound. While no U.S. marine mammal species has gone extinct, and some have recovered, others are facing steep odds for their survival, including the highly endangered North Atlantic right whale and Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale.

Please protect marine mammals and coastal communities and vote “no” on the Johnson amendment to H.R. 729.

Sincerely,

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Alaska Wilderness Action  
Alliance for a Living Ocean  
American Rivers  
Animal Legal Defense Fund  
Animal Welfare Institute  
Born Free USA  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Center for Coastal Studies  
Cetacean Society International  
Clean Ocean Action  
Coastwalk/CCTA  
Conservation Law Foundation  
Conservation Voters of South Carolina  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Earthjustice  
Endangered Species Coalition  
Environment America  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Friends of the Earth  
Group for the East End  
Hands Across the Sand  
Healthy Gulf  
Humane Society Legislative Fund  
Inland Ocean Coalition  
International Fund for Animal Welfare  
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute  
League of Conservation Voters

Lynnhaven River NOW  
Marine Mammal Alliance Nantucket  
Mass Audubon  
Milwaukee Riverkeeper  
Mission Blue/Sylvia Earle Alliance  
National Audubon Society  
National Parks Conservation Association  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Ocean Conservancy  
Ocean Conservation Research  
Ocean River Institute, Inc  
Oceanic Preservation Society  
Sanctuary Education Advisory Specialists SEAS LLC  
Save the Sound  
Save Our Shores  
Self-Reliance Corporation  
Shedd Aquarium  
Southern Environmental Law Center  
Surfrider Foundation  
The Humane Society of the United States  
The Moore Charitable Foundation  
The Ocean Project  
The Wilderness Society  
Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center  
Whale and Dolphin Conservation  
Wildlife Conservation Society  
World Wildlife Fund