

An open letter to the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board:

Thursday, January 23, 2003

Today, you will be making a precedent setting decision with long-lasting implications. You will be deciding whether or not to allow oil and gas exploration along the coast of Cape Breton Island.

For the last three and a half years, fishermen, environmentalists, tourism operators, scientists, and First Nations representatives from the three Maritime Provinces have been working together to prevent the introduction of oil and gas development into the near-shore coastal waters along Cape Breton Island.

We have protested, negotiated, organized, pleaded. We have testified at countless public meetings and before a public review commission. And, most recently, we have participated in a long and difficult multi-stakeholder process that included the companies wanting to conduct seismic testing in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and Sydney Bight.

Why should you reject these permits?

- This is one of the most biologically productive marine areas in Canada. 20,000 fishermen and fish plant workers are employed in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence alone, with thousands more employed in the Sydney Bight fishery.
- These licenses start at the shore line. They would not be allowed in most jurisdictions in North America. Florida, for instance, does not allow any new oil and gas development within 100 miles of shore and the Bush Administration is now buying back old leases within this zone. Near shore developments are not allowed along the whole US Eastern seaboard, or off California, British Columbia, most of Europe and Alaska.
- The southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and Sydney Bight are essentially one ecosystem. EVERY YEAR MORE THAN TWO BILLION POUNDS OF ANIMAL LIFE MIGRATES THROUGH THESE WATERS. THIS MIGRATION IS LARGER THAN ANY KNOWN ANIMAL MIGRATION IN TERRESTRIAL NORTH AMERICA.
- Experts point out that 40% of all marine fish on Canada's East Coast are found in this area.
- The area is home to *endangered species* – to Leatherback Turtles, Blue Whales and Right Whales. Seismic blasting can permanently harm the whales.
- The cod populations are in a desperate condition. The *seismic testing could seriously impact these perilously threatened fish*. So too could it impact precarious hake, and the decimated Bras d'Or herring. There is *not a single scientific study anywhere in the world on the impacts of seismic on snow crab* – the most lucrative fishery in Cape Breton.
- These precious aspects of our environment are being threatened for little or no economic gain. Seismic testing will provide *no permanent local jobs*. Even if development should occur, there are no guarantees of economic benefit. In fact, experience so far in Nova Scotia suggests that local benefits will be few.
- We already have seen nearly seven million hectares of Nova Scotia's off-shore under license. Enough is enough!

THE DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS TESTIFIED IN THE PUBLIC REVIEW THAT THIS AREA IS MORE SENSITIVE AND MORE DIVERSE THAN GEORGES BANK – the rich fishing grounds off South West Nova Scotia.

Georges Bank is protected by a moratorium. These areas must be protected as well!

Please, in the interests of certainty for the worried communities of coastal Cape Breton and communities throughout the southern Gulf as well, and in the interests of certainty for the proponents, END THIS CONFLICT. Cancel the licenses and protect these important fisheries, stunning coastal vistas, and rich marine bio-diversity from the threat of oil and gas development.

Respectfully yours,

Maritime Fisherman's Union · Sierra Club of Canada · Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia · Po'tlo'tek Fish & Wildlife Association · World Wildlife Fund Canada · Ecology Action Centre · Friends of Nature · Environmental Defense · Area 18 Western Cape Breton Snow Crab Association · Area 19 Western Cape Breton Snow Crab Association · Gulf Nova Scotia Fleet Planning Board · Council of Canadians · PEI Fisherman's Union · Gulf Nova Scotia Herring Federation · Environmental Coalition of PEI · Margaree Salmon Association · Conservation Council of New Brunswick · Margaree Environmental Association · Stewards of St. Ann's Harbour Association · Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group · Caretakers of the Environment-Canada · PEI Council of the Arts · Ocean Voice International · Whale Watch Captains Dennis Cox, Cyril Fraser, Fred Lawrence, Stanley McKinnon, Danny Robinson and Mark Timmons

For more information contact Save Our Seas and Shores Coalition, 1-888-810-4204, or check this website:
www.sierraclub.ca/national