

Testimony of Tom Kies
President of the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast

House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Legislative Hearing on Offshore Oil Drilling Bills
May 13, 2021

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify before this Committee today on the importance of protecting our coastlines from new and expanded offshore drilling, and to offer my support for the Clean Ocean and Safe Tourism (COAST) Anti-Drilling Act. I am representing more than 42,000 businesses that make up the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast. Our members understand—as I do—just how valuable clean shores and a healthy ocean are to coastal communities and to our local, state, and national economies. Our lives and livelihoods depend on clean, oil-free beaches. My testimony today will address the economic consequences of offshore drilling, the devastating threats posed by climate change and exacerbated by offshore drilling, and the bipartisan legislation this Committee is considering to ensure the health and long-term sustainability of our ocean economy.

In addition to being President of the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast, I'm also the President of the Carteret County Chamber of Commerce on the coast of North Carolina. The engine that keeps our county's economy afloat, even during the pandemic, is tourism. We can weather hurricanes and pandemics, but if our tourism industry was to shut down because of an oil spill, that's something that could damage us for a long, long time. That's why I was one of the co-founders of the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast and President of that organization for the last three years.

Decade after decade, the American people are told by the oil and gas industry that it is committed to safety and the prevention of oil spill disasters, yet time and again, they occur. When a spill occurs, it is not industry that loses out the most—it is the average individual—a hospitality worker, a local business owner, or a commercial fisherman—who, with their families, feel the economic damage from a ravaged coastal community. And unlike large oil corporations, small businesses don't have the luxury of being financially protected by insurance policies should an oil spill occur in their region. Catastrophic oil spills, like the BP *Deepwater Horizon*, Exxon Valdez, and Santa Barbara disasters pose unacceptable risks to coastal economies that depend upon a healthy ocean to survive. Toxic oil poisons marine wildlife, causes beach closures, and shuts down lucrative fishing areas. Unfortunately, we know from experience that where we drill, we spill. Permanently protecting our coasts from offshore drilling will safeguard our coastal economies from the next oil disaster.

That is why we support the Clean Ocean and Safe Tourism (COAST) Anti-Drilling Act to permanently protect the Atlantic Coast from offshore oil drilling. The oil and gas leasing program on the Outer Continental Shelf has a direct impact on the thousands of business owners and hundreds of thousands of jobs that power our coastal economy. Healthy coasts are the lifeblood of our economy and the backbone of countless small businesses that depend on ocean tourism for steady revenue. Residents and people from all over the world frequent our coastlines to fish, hike, golf, kayak, surf, wine and dine, and enjoy our beaches. According to the latest government data, the clean coast economy on the Atlantic coast supports roughly 1.75 million

jobs and nearly \$137 billion in GDP through businesses like hotels, restaurants, charter boats, gas stations, guide businesses, and gear shops.¹ These long-standing industries continue to make our coastal communities vibrant and prosperous today. Responsibly managed fisheries and well protected beaches can continue to drive economic activity for years to come. The same cannot be said about oil, which is a finite resource. When the oil runs out, so do the jobs, leaving behind a legacy of coastal industrialization and pollution. More drilling means more climate pollution that we simply cannot afford. We are already experiencing increased destruction caused by climate change—including prolonged drought, stronger hurricanes and winter storms, and rising sea levels. The economic crisis that climate change is unleashing could devastate our coastal communities. We must transition our economic values to focus on mitigating and eliminating future dangers rather than continuing a business-as-usual approach to environmental management. Our businesses are facing the impacts of warming oceans, rising seas, and increasingly disastrous weather patterns head on. Over just the last year, costs incurred from natural disasters *doubled* in the United States from the previous year. In 2020, natural disasters caused \$95 billion in damages.² Imagine the level of destruction we will face if this trend continues and damages double again this year, and then again next year and the year after that, and so on. We cannot afford to wait. Permanently protecting federal waters from drilling will prevent over 19 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions — the equivalent of taking every car in the nation off the road for 15 years. And it would prevent over \$720 billion in damages to people, property, and the environment, letting our businesses prosper long into the future.³ Prohibiting new offshore drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf will help our nation address the climate emergency while protecting coastal communities and millions of jobs.

Drilling off our coasts is not the answer. Clean energy jobs currently outnumber fossil fuel jobs in the United States by a 3-to-1 margin, employing nearly 3.3 million workers.⁴ As its growth continues apace, this sector of our economy will be a key 21st-century jobs creator—and will secure the achievable future where this nation is powered by one hundred percent clean, renewable energy. By permanently ending new leasing for offshore drilling and investing in this sector, we can advance ambitious and durable climate action that protects coastal economies, creates jobs, and benefits everyone.

We urge Congress to consider the disastrous economic impact offshore oil drilling and its associated greenhouse gas emissions has on our communities. For the sake of small business owners up and down America's coasts, now is the time for action. On behalf of the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast, I applaud and thank Members of Congress who are working to protect our oceans, beaches, and ways of life from expanded offshore drilling and for their leadership on bills such as the Clean Ocean and Safe Tourism (COAST) Anti-Drilling Act.

Thank you.

¹ Oceana (2021) Clean Coast Economy: Technical Methodology

² Flavelle, C. (Jan. 7, 2021) U.S. Disaster Costs Doubled in 2020, Reflecting Costs of Climate Change. *The New York Times*. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/07/climate/2020-disaster-costs.html>

³Oceana (Jan. 2021) Offshore Drilling Fuels the Climate Crisis and Threatens the Economy. https://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/2021/01/27/final_climate_economy_fact_sheet_m1_doi.pdf.

⁴ E2 (2020) Clean Jobs Better Jobs: An examination of clean energy job wages and benefits.