January 14, 2020

The Honorable Senator Stephen Goldfinch
South Carolina Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Environmental Subcommittee

Re: Comments on S. 870

Dear Chairman Goldfinch and members of the Subcommittee,

On behalf of Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, I am writing in support of S. 870, which would help protect South Carolina's coast from the impacts of offshore drilling.

The risks of offshore drilling are high, its benefits are minimal, and there are much better energy alternatives that the State should pursue instead.

Drilling for oil and gas off of South Carolina's coast would jeopardize our invaluable coastal environment, which is a major quality of life factor for coastal residents, and is the primary resource generating more than 86,000 jobs and nearly $9 billion in tourism dollars in our coastal counties.[1]

The most obvious potential impact of offshore drilling would be a large spill, such as the Deepwater Horizon disaster that occurred ten years ago in the Gulf of Mexico. While such major spills are uncommon, they are catastrophic when they happen. The Deepwater Horizon drilling rig was situated about 42 miles from shore, yet the oil it released washed up along more than 1,300 miles of shoreline, heavily oiling beaches as far as 288 miles to the west (Marsh Island, LA) and 155 miles to the east (Fort Walton Beach, FL). The spill caused death and illness for people and animals alike and devastated key segments of coastal economy for the Gulf coast.

The economic risks of offshore drilling extend beyond the catastrophic oil spills. While large oil spills are high-risk, low-frequency events, the industrialization of the coast that accompanies offshore development, such as pipelines and refineries, blights the coast and deters tourism even in the absence of sensational oil spills. Analysis shows that coastal counties on the Gulf coast without such infrastructure generate twice as much tourism revenue per capita as counties that host such infrastructure.[2] Thousands of smaller spills, amounting to millions of gallons of oil occur each year in the Gulf of Mexico, where offshore drilling is long-established.[3] Given the challenging environment offshore, spills can be difficult to fix and may last a long time, such as the ongoing spill from the Taylor Energy Mississippi Canyon 20-A platform, which has been releasing hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil into the Gulf since 2004 and will likely never be fully repaired.

Meanwhile, the purported benefits of offshore drilling are very limited. Any economic development from the industry would be directly risking the Palmetto State's existing, robust coastal tourism economy. The potential oil and gas production would be miniscule compared to the existing fossil fuel market and would do virtually nothing to lower the prices we pay at the gas pump nor would it meaningfully increase our energy independence. With petroleum export markets newly opened, any

1 U.S. Travel Association, 2019. *The Economic Impact of Travel on South Carolina Counties 2018.*
2 Southern Environmental Law Center, 2016. "Oil drilling infrastructure drives away tourism dollars."
3 Emma Grey Ellis, *Wired,* 2016. "Thousands of Invisible Oil Spills Are Destroying the Gulf."

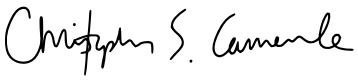
oil and gas produced off our coast--at our risk--could and likely would be sent somewhere else in the world.

There are much better opportunities for South Carolina to harness real energy self-reliance and offshore energy resources. South Carolina has a massive offshore wind resource, which could provide a very large portion of our state's electrical power while posing no risk of catastrophic spills, as oil does. Moreover, there is a tremendous emerging market for electric vehicles, which can be powered by in-state renewable energy, promoting billions of dollars of investment in our state, while offsetting any perceived need for expanded oil production. Because electric vehicles have much lower fueling and maintenance costs than conventional vehicles, they are already less expensive to drive over the lifetime of the vehicle. However, in the next few years, it is expected that even the purchase price of electric vehicles will be lower than that of conventional vehicles. The opportunities of vehicle electrification and offshore wind development are strategies that South Carolina should pursue instead of the folly of offshore oil.

Given that offshore drilling jeopardizes our coast, that its benefits are very small, and that South Carolina has better energy opportunities to pursue, the State's policy should be to do what it can to protect our coast from the impacts of offshore drilling. Passing S. 870 is a large step in the right direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



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