

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 17, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Ms. Stephanie Bowers  
Chargé d'Affaires  
U.S. Embassy in The Bahamas  
42 Queen St.  
Nassau, The Bahamas

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Ms. Bowers:

We write to you to express concerns regarding Bahamas Petroleum Company's (BPC) recent announcement of plans to begin drilling in Bahamian waters, in which they originally announced their intention to drill as soon as April 2020.<sup>i</sup> As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on global health and the global economy, it is our understanding that BPC has delayed drilling until October 2020.<sup>ii</sup>

As coastal and near-coastal Member of Congress who have been fighting for years to protect the Atlantic Ocean, Straits of Florida, and Eastern Gulf of Mexico from the threat of expanded offshore drilling in U.S. waters, this news is cause for great concern. As the representatives of Florida and East Coast communities, we respectfully ask you to join us in protecting the shared coastal economies and ecosystems of the United States and The Bahamas from offshore drilling by advocating to the Bahamian government that it should deny BPC any authorizations necessary to begin exploratory drilling.

As you know, in 2010, the BP *Deepwater Horizon* oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico. This disaster claimed 11 lives and set off one of the worst environmental disasters in our nation's history. As more than 200 million gallons of oil gushed into the Gulf, fragile marine ecosystems were destroyed, tourism declined throughout the region, and consumer confidence in seafood dropped. A government study estimated the seafood industry lost nearly \$1 billion,<sup>iii</sup> and the recreation industry lost more than a half-billion dollars following the disaster<sup>iv</sup>. We are still feeling the repercussions a decade later.

The Bahamian government should learn from our tragedy. We understand that the Bahamian people rely on a clean and healthy coast, since tourism is an important economic driver. A 2014 study found that travel and tourism contributed more than 40 percent of The Bahamas' GDP.<sup>v</sup> The coastal communities we represent rely on a similar way of life. Our constituents are people who work in the tourism industry, fishers who are dependent on abundant catches, and business owners with coastal properties. No matter the size of your coastal community or business, the concern is the same: expanding offshore drilling is not worth the risk.

Unfortunately, oil spills do not respect state or national boundaries. Since the exploratory drilling proposed for next month is only 150 miles from Florida's coast, and another license area is only 50 miles from Miami, oil slicks from BPC's drilling activities could affect any Bahamian island

as well as the East Coast of the United States. Oil is toxic to marine life,<sup>vi</sup> and a spill in Bahamian waters could quickly damage vibrant corals, kill off seagrass beds, and coat important mangrove ecosystems, which are important carbon sinks.

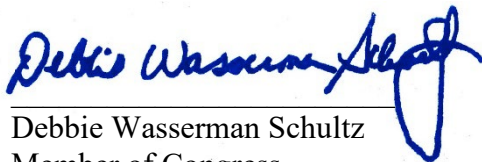
Introducing offshore drilling to The Bahamas also goes directly against recent efforts in that nation to expand The Bahamas National Protected Areas System, which works to preserve marine habitats and protect Bahamian resources.<sup>vii</sup> It would be unfortunate to bring environmental risk to these marine sites with the prospect of oil pollution, as they provide critical ecosystem benefits like food security and coastal protection.

A healthy ocean is the foundation of a coastal way of life in both the United States and The Bahamas. Coastal communities thrive when there is a healthy marine environment. Introducing the threat of an offshore drilling disaster would threaten that foundation.

We respectfully request that you convey our concerns to the government of The Bahamas to protect the beauty, the ecosystems, and the economies of The Bahamas and the entire East Coast of the United States from the threat of dirty and dangerous offshore drilling. We urge you to do what you can to protect our shared resources and both of our countries' beautiful beaches by urging the Bahamian government to deny BPC any necessary or additional authorizations for offshore drilling, and to let these licenses expire.

Thank you for your consideration of our bipartisan concerns.

Sincerely,

  
Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress

  
Debbie Mucarsel-Powell  
Member of Congress

/s Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

/s Matt Gaetz  
Member of Congress

/s Donna E. Shalala  
Member of Congress

/s Lois Frankel  
Member of Congress

/s Darren Soto  
Member of Congress

/s Charlie Crist  
Member of Congress

/s Theodore E. Deutch  
Member of Congress

/s Francis Rooney  
Member of Congress

/s Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress

/s Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress

/s David E. Price  
Member of Congress

/s Tom Malinowski  
Member of Congress

/s Al Lawson  
Member of Congress

/s Christopher H. Smith  
Member of Congress

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<sup>i</sup> BPS (2020) H1 2020 Operations Roadmap to Drilling. Bahamas Petroleum Company. Available: [https://polaris.brighterir.com/public/bahamas\\_petroleum\\_company/news/rns\\_widget/story/wvkj0px](https://polaris.brighterir.com/public/bahamas_petroleum_company/news/rns_widget/story/wvkj0px). Accessed Feb 20, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Offshore (2020, March 25) BPC pushes back offshore Bahamas well to late 2020. Available: <https://www.offshore-mag.com/drilling-completion/article/14172749/bahamas-petroleum-company-pushes-back-offshore-bahamas-well-to-late2020>. Accessed Mar 25, 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> BOEM (2016) Carroll, Michael; Gentner, Brad; Larkin, Sherry; Quigley, Kate; Perlot, Nicole, et al. An Analysis of the Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on the Gulf of Mexico Seafood Industry. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, New Orleans, LA. OCS Study BOEM 2016-020.

<sup>iv</sup> NOAA Assessing the Impacts from *Deepwater Horizon*. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration | US Department of Commerce. Available: <https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/about/media/assessing-impacts-deepwater-horizon.html>. Accessed Apr 10, 2019.

<sup>v</sup> The Nature Conservancy under and the Bahamas Protected Project (2017) Expanding The Bahamas Marine Protected Area Network to Protect 20% of the Marine and Coastal Environment by 2020: A Gap Analysis. Available: [https://marineplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Bahamas-Protected\\_Marine-Gap-Analysis\\_Full-Report\\_2017-DIGITAL.pdf](https://marineplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Bahamas-Protected_Marine-Gap-Analysis_Full-Report_2017-DIGITAL.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> NOAA The Toxicity of Oil: What's the Big Deal? | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration | US Department of Commerce. Available: <https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/about/media/toxicity-oil-whats-big-deal.html>. Accessed Feb 25, 2020.

<sup>vii</sup> BPAF Who We Are – Bahamas Protected Areas Fund. Available: <http://bahamasprotected.com/about/>. Accessed Feb 25, 2020.