



26 June 2020

The Most Honourable Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister of The Bahamas
Office of the Prime Minister
Sir Cecil Wallace Whitfield Centre
PO Box CB 10980
Nassau, N.P, The Bahamas
primeminister@bahamas.gov.bs

Dear Prime Minister Minnis,

We write to express our vigorous opposition to oil drilling in Bahamian waters and strongly urge that you move immediately to cancel all existing licences, reject all proposed renewals and impose a permanent ban on fossil fuel exploration anywhere within our maritime borders.

The critical threat to our world-renowned oceans, reefs and beaches cannot be exaggerated. All drilling is dirty drilling and the threat of a major catastrophe looms always on the horizon. We therefore strongly advise you to intervene to protect our vital economic, recreational and ecological treasures before it is too late.

This year is the 10th Anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill into the Gulf of Mexico, the most catastrophic environmental disaster in the history of offshore drilling. The spill, consisting of nearly 200 million gallons of oil, fouled 16,000 miles of coastline along five US states, utterly destroyed fisheries and caused an unprecedented and as yet untold level of damage to marine life.

The Deepwater Horizon rig was an exploratory well, just like the one that Bahamas Petroleum Company (BPC) is currently seeking to drill here. Even a partial repeat of that disaster would devastate our tourism, commercial fishing, diving and marine recreation industries. Tourism alone generates 50% of our Gross Domestic Product, while these other industries are vital to the survival of many far-flung communities. Simply put, drilling threatens our very way of life.

Furthermore, the United States is watching. In an April 17, 2020 letter to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and US Charge d’Affaires in the Bahamas Stephanie Bowers, a group of Congressmen and Congresswomen representing communities up and down the East Coast voiced their strong opposition to the BPC project and oil exploration in the Bahamas generally.

“The United States cannot afford another Deepwater Horizon disaster,” the letter read. “This bipartisan group of members respects the sovereignty of the Bahamas, but a spill in Bahamian waters could bring ruin to both of our countries’ shorelines ... Oil is toxic to marine life 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.”

We believe the government should respect the concerns of our closest strategic ally and trading partner, particularly in recognition of the critical emergency aid provided by US officials in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian and considering the desperate economic situation in which we find ourselves following the COVID-19 lockdown. It is vital that we continue to cultivate a spirit of goodwill and cooperation – by demonstrating responsible economic choices – with our closest trading partners.

In addition, any environmental damage to the US coast also exposes The Bahamas to the very real threat of massive liability actions in the US courts. Suits may be brought, for example, by the State of Florida, where there is already a moratorium on offshore drilling in place; any other affected state; any community in an affected state; any affected individual; American NGOs; or any combination of the above. Those affected could also bring The Bahamas before international courts where our reputation would be publicly tarnished for all to see. Considering the swiftness and massive reach of the Gulf Stream and its close proximity to BPC’s proposed drilling site, the possible range of environmental devastation along the US coastline – and therefore the potential liability – is beyond calculation.

It is clear that neither BPC or The Bahamas government could fund the level of emergency response and cleanup needed to mitigate a large-scale disaster. The Deepwater Horizon spill cost \$65 billion – more than five times the GDP of the Bahamas. Were such a disaster to take place it would pose an existential threat to The Bahamas, directly threatening the livelihoods of the vast majority of Bahamians.

We are part of a growing grassroots coalition opposing offshore drilling, which is already attracting concerned Bahamians from all walks of life. We cannot afford to put our nation’s future at risk, nor risk its reputation being tied to a devastating accident. Again, we urge you to cancel existing licenses immediately, disregard any license renewal proposals and place a permanent ban on offshore oil drilling. Let us be known for pristine waterways and our commitment to a sustainable economy, not dirty fossil fuels or another uncontrolled and costly oil disaster.

Casuarina McKinney-Lambert
BREEF

Rashema Ingraham
Waterkeepers Bahamas