

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

For Immediate Release
July 13, 2012

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Murkowski, Hastings Press NOAA, BSEE About Arctic Protests

Letters Demand Answers to Why No Permits, Impact Studies are Required for Greenpeace Protest Activities in the Arctic

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska and Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Washington, [sent a letter](#) to Dr. Jane Lubchenco, the Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and James Watson, Director of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), asking what measures NOAA and BSEE have taken to ensure that the planned protest activities in the Arctic by Greenpeace do not disrupt or threaten safe operations, disturb marine mammals or interfere with anticipated Native Alaskan subsistence efforts.

“We share your concern for ensuring proper oversight of oil and gas operations on the Outer Continental Shelf,” Murkowski and Hastings wrote. “In that regard, we want to be sure that you have the resources, are planning and prepared to respond to the steps that Greenpeace is planning to impede exploratory drilling operations in arctic waters off the north coast of Alaska.”

Greenpeace is attempting to protest and “monitor” Shell’s activities by interfering with permitted work in the Arctic through the usage of a 216 foot ice class ship, two large rigid hull and four small inflatables, two submarines, and an aerial drone. Murkowski and Hastings are concerned that federal agencies have not accounted for the likelihood that Greenpeace’s activities will cause disturbance to marine mammals, pollution to the environment, or conflict with Native Alaskans through the physical presence of vessels.

“NOAA’s and BSEE’s analysis of planned oil and gas exploration in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas has devoted extraordinary and unprecedented attention to the potential impacts of vessels and other activities,” they wrote. “Though the potential for impacts is similar, there has been no such analysis or permitting of the planned protest activities or the operation of the vessels participating in them. In addition to the environmental problems presented by the protest fleet, it seems that there are special dangers in having multiple submarines operated by different parties in and around drilling operations.”

Murkowski is the Ranking Member on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Hastings is the Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee.

The letters are [attached](#).

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July 11, 2012

James Watson
Director
Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Watson:

Greenpeace is pledging to impede planned exploratory drilling operations in arctic waters off the north coast of Alaska this summer. A protest fleet, including a 216-foot ice class ship, two large rigid hull and four small inflatables, two submarines, and a drone is reportedly en route to participate in these activities. Allowing intrusions by any group to disrupt or threaten federally-permitted operations is a direct threat to the careful planning and safe operations necessary for these activities and puts in jeopardy those workers and our environment, as well as the subsistence interests of Alaska's Native people.

The announcement that Greenpeace activists are planning to operate at least one submersible in and around the drilling operations and obtain core samples and other natural material from the seabed raises significant concerns. The dangers of having multiple submarines operated by multiple parties in and around drilling operations are obvious. Without any exploratory permit or other arrangement with BSEE or the leaseholder, how can such action proceed in compliance with the law? Please provide us with the specific steps BSEE can take to address incursions into drilling operations by submarines operated by outside parties.

Additionally, given that industry is required to operate pursuant to environmental analysis under federal law, we write to also request what, if any, environmental analysis has been conducted by or submitted to BSEE in order to consider potential impacts and analyze alternatives to the proposed activity to be undertaken by these groups. Have their planned disruptive actions been reviewed in any way by BSEE?

Given your years of experience in the U.S. Coast Guard, we know you understand that the men and women working onboard these offshore drilling vessels should be devoting their full attention to the job at hand in order to ensure safe operations. Any deviation caused by disruption, harassment or menacing actions could increase risks to these approved activities.

In sum, we ask what measures BSEE is planning to ensure that the planned protest activities do not threaten the safety of offshore drilling operations and the workers. Specifically, please provide both of our Committees with detailed information on what analysis will be done, what permits, with what conditions will be required, and what tools BSEE has to address this matter. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on
Energy and Natural Resources



Doc Hastings
Chairman
House Committee on
Natural Resources

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July 11, 2012

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, PhD
Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere and
Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Room 5128
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Dr. Lubchenco:

We share your concern for ensuring proper oversight of oil and gas operations on the Outer Continental Shelf. In that regard, we want to be sure that you have the resources, and are planning and prepared to respond to the steps that Greenpeace is planning to impede exploratory drilling operations in arctic waters off the north coast of Alaska. A protest fleet, including a 216-foot ice class ship, two large rigid hull and four small inflatables, two submarines, and a drone is reportedly en route to participate in these activities.

NOAA's analysis of planned oil and gas exploration in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas has paid extraordinary attention to the potential impacts of vessels and other activities. Those activities went through an extensive federal regulatory process, as well as negotiations with subsistence users, prior to receiving permits and approvals conditioned to minimize disturbance of marine mammals by noise, discharge of pollutants, or the physical presence or operation of vessels.

Though the potential for impacts is similar, there has been no such analysis or permitting of the planned protest activities or the operation of the vessels participating in them. In addition to the environmental problems presented by the protest fleet, it seems that there are special dangers in having multiple submarines operated by different parties in and around drilling operations.

We believe it is of fundamental importance that our Nation's laws are applied fully and fairly to all, and that if you allow such actions to occur, disrupting or threatening these operations, it will put both worker safety and the environment at risk. It will also create conflicts with marine mammals and those who depend on them.

To that end, we ask what measures NOAA is planning to ensure that the planned protest activities do not disrupt and threaten safe operations, disturb marine mammals or interfere with anticipated Native Alaskan subsistence efforts. Specifically, please provide both of our Committees with detailed information on what analysis will be done, what permits are required, with what conditions will be required, and what tools NOAA has to address these concerns. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on
Energy and Natural Resources



Doc Hastings
Chairman
House Committee on
Natural Resources