

September 19, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid, Majority Leader  
528 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-2803

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader  
361A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-1702

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman, Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-6150

The Honorable Pete V. Domenici, Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-6150

Re: H.R. 6899, The Comprehensive American Energy Security and Consumer Protection Act

Dear Senators:

While we have not taken an overall position on offshore drilling or on the issue of revenue sharing with the states, I am writing on behalf of The Nature Conservancy to urge that any legislation opening waters in offshore areas to further oil and gas exploration and production (and any subsequent legislation leasing offshore areas for other uses) provide funding to protect marine biodiversity and conserve coastal resources.

The Nature Conservancy has long worked to protect the natural systems of our nation's coasts and nearshore waters. We have particular expertise in using scientific planning methods to guide practical and tangible actions to protect the coastal environment.

As the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative (JOCI) said in its letter to you of September 15, 2008, "from the depletion of fish stocks, the chronic runoff of chemical and nutrient pollution from land-based sources, massive die-offs of coral reefs, and the continuing destruction of coastal habitat, our oceans and coasts are under continuing assault." We join with Admiral James Watkins and former Congressman Leon Panetta in urging you to reinvest a significant portion of any revenue generated by new oil and gas leasing and production to long term support of programs that will protect *all* of our marine and coastal resources by addressing these urgent threats.

And, because of the moratorium on drilling that has been in place over the past twenty years, the scientific information necessary to make sound leasing and development decisions that will

protect marine biodiversity and coastal resources in the newly open areas is out of date. Most of what we know about the potential impact of oil and gas production on marine life in our EEZ is based on research done in the 1970s. Ocean ecosystems have open boundaries and are subject to rapid change. It is therefore essential that baseline information on the offshore environment including the status of marine biodiversity be updated before any leasing decisions are made. The Conservancy urges that legislation opening new areas to drilling provide funds for NOAA, USGS and other agencies to conduct the necessary research in cooperation with state and private institutions to assure that any leasing decisions and subsequent operations are based on the sound science that will fully protect marine life and our coastal resources.

Additional offshore oil and gas production represents depletion of a non-renewable public resource. There are important long-standing precedents for investing a portion of the proceeds from the sale of these resources to restore and sustain natural areas and natural systems for the benefit of future generations. It is our hope that any new legislation adopted to govern OCS drilling will continue to compensate the public in this manner. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Bendick  
Director, US Government Relations