Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 1, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary,

In the coming weeks you will be making a number of decisions concerning the future of oil and gas development on America's Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). These decisions will have a profound impact on our nation's marine ecosystems and coastal communities. As you move to develop your comprehensive offshore energy plan, we urge you to keep in mind the President's commitment to developing ocean policies that prioritize the federal government's stewardship responsibilities and ensure the sustainability of ocean and coastal economies. Americans want clean energy production and a healthy marine environment. We believe the recommendations below provide a sensible and balanced approach that allows production from offshore oil and gas reserves as a bridge to a sustainable energy future while protecting some of our nation's most vulnerable and precious natural resources.

- Set aside the Bush Administration's Draft Proposed 5-year OCS Oil and Gas Program (DPP) for 2010-2015: Americans deserve more than a plan that was hastily put together in the last days of the Bush Administration and would dramatically expedite leasing of America's OCS. We are aware that you have extended the comment period on the DPP to September 21, but after the thousands of comments and the four regional hearings you conducted in April, it is clear that the plan is highly controversial, suffers the same flaws as the existing plan, and does not represent a forward-looking vision for America's energy future.

- Remedy the legal and scientific flaws in the current 2007-2012 Program: In the Arctic, the Department can meet America's need for energy production and a healthy environment by putting in place a science-based precautionary management program to determine if offshore industrial activities should be conducted and, if so, where, when and how. In the meantime, the Department should defer leasing and drilling in the Arctic Ocean. This recommendation is consistent with the President's memorandum of June 12, 2009, regarding the need for a national policy for oceans, coasts, and the Great Lakes and mandating the development of a framework for marine spatial planning. This initial effort for the Alaska region could serve as a template for ecosystem based management for other regions around coastal America.

- Request the President use his authority under Section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to withdraw the North Aleutian Basin (Bristol Bay) from future leasing: For many years, the area was off limits due to both congressional and executive bans on oil and gas leasing. In addition, prior leases in this area were already bought back at taxpayers' expense to ensure protection.

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This approach will allow for energy development across the United States while meeting Americans' need for energy and a healthy environment By rejecting the overreaching Bush DPP for 2010-2015 and proceeding with a science-based planning process, you will provide the Department with time to develop a balanced offshore energy plan that is grounded in science and a bridge to a renewable energy future.

We believe taking these steps will enable you to find the appropriate balance between protecting American's most vulnerable natural resources, subsistence cultures and fragile coastal areas and maintaining needed offshore oil and gas production in those areas where such development of the OCS is found to be consistent with broader national policies.

Sincerely,

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Maurice D. Hinchey

Mazie K. Hirono

Keith Ellison

James P. McGovern

Bob Filner

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