

CONTACT: Laura Cantral, 202-354-6444

Email: lcantrol@merid.org

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Joint Initiative Concerned by Trump Actions on Offshore Energy

April 28, 2017 (Washington, DC) — Today President Donald Trump issued an executive order, *Implementing an America-First Offshore Energy Strategy*, that directs Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke to review locations available for offshore oil and gas exploration. It also requires review of certain regulations governing this process, including streamlining permitting for seismic surveys. It directs Secretary Zinke to revise or initiate a new five-year outer continental shelf oil and gas leasing program, and it reverses President Barack Obama's withdrawal of areas in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans. In addition, the executive order calls for a review of all national marine sanctuary and marine national monument designations over the past 10 years and dictates that any future designations or expansions will require a full accounting of energy and mineral resources by the Department of the Interior along with examination of the potential impact of designation or expansion on the development of those resources.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is concerned by these actions. While offshore oil and gas continues to be one way to meet America's energy needs, it should be carried out safely and in a manner that balances the needs of the environment with economic development. In addition, the Joint Initiative is troubled by actions to revisit the designation and expansion of national marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments. Such protections have been shown to improve fish stocks, bolster food security, promote marine biodiversity, and buffer against the impacts of rapidly changing ocean conditions, all of which benefit the health and well-being of the American people.

Clear policy direction to guide any offshore development is crucial to ensuring that it is done responsibly, safely, and economically. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's five-year leasing program is a methodical, process-rich activity that takes at least two years to complete. It uses best available science and extensive stakeholder engagement to ensure that balanced decisions are made about the use of the outer continental shelf. Revisiting the program just months after it was completed for the years 2017-2022 undercuts this sound process and erodes confidence among stakeholder groups and industry alike.

In the Arctic, where offshore energy development activities present unique challenges, clear and balanced governance is essential. The Arctic is critical to our national security, and drilling in a strategic and ecologically sensitive part of the world will exacerbate threats to Arctic resources and global security. The infrastructure and safeguards necessary for oil and gas development to proceed safely and responsibly are not yet in place in this fragile region. In fact, a Department of the Interior risk assessment found that development of select Chukchi Sea leases carried a 75 percent chance of a major oil spill, yet the Arctic lacks the capability to respond to an oil spill. "Unpredictable conditions, severe weather, and inadequate infrastructure make drilling in the Arctic risky and logistically challenging" said Christine Todd Whitman, Co-Chair of the Joint Initiative, former Governor of New Jersey, and Co-Chair of the Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force on U.S. Strategy in the Arctic. "While drilling could potentially bring economic gains to local communities, an oil spill in the Arctic would have devastating impacts on the lives of Arctic

residents and pollute fragile ecosystems that subsistence communities rely upon.” One such fragile Arctic ecosystem is directly affected by this executive order. The Joint Initiative is disappointed by the order’s revocation of the Northern Bearing Sea Climate Resilience area.

Other marine ecosystems across America are also affected by this executive order. National marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments protect ecosystems and preserve our nation’s environmental and cultural heritage. They also allow for a range of ocean uses, including fishing, tourism, education, and research. Each year, national marine sanctuaries are visited by 42 million people and generate about \$8 billion. Decisions about designating or expanding national marine sanctuaries are the result of an extensive public process involving scientific review, an assessment of current and potential uses, stakeholder engagement, and interagency consultation, as required by law. Accordingly, reviewing designations of sanctuaries and monuments from the past 10 years, and requiring additional review by the Department of the Interior for future designations or expansions is redundant and unnecessary.

As we [stated](#) earlier this week, the Joint Initiative urges the Trump Administration to take a systematic approach as it crafts its legacy for the oceans and our ocean-based economy. The administration must carefully consider the valuable role that national marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments play to ensure ecological, historic, and cultural benefits for the welfare of current and future generations. In addition, the administration must maintain predictable policy processes for oil and gas development that ensure activities on the outer continental shelf proceed in a safe, environmentally responsible, and economically beneficial manner. The bipartisan Joint Initiative, comprised of a Leadership Council of 23 senior leaders with extensive ocean and coastal policy expertise from all sectors, stands ready to help the Department of the Interior as it conducts its reviews and determines its recommendations to the President.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative brings together all sectors of the ocean community to catalyze action and monitor progress toward meaningful ocean policy reform. Meridian Institute serves as the secretariat for the Joint Initiative.