RE: Request for Information on 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil & Gas Leasing Program

Dear Ms. Hammerle:

In response to the request for information on the development of the federal government’s 2017-2022 offshore oil and gas leasing program, the undersigned organizations write to convey our strong support for including all 26 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) planning areas in the development of the Draft Proposed Program. Proceeding otherwise would prematurely exclude regions from leasing consideration at the outset in the absence of critical environmental analysis.

Based on the latest federal estimate, the U.S. OCS contains approximately 90 billion barrels of oil and over 404 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Many of these resources, however, are located in planning areas that are currently either completely or largely prohibited from development.

The experience in the Gulf of Mexico demonstrates how significant offshore energy development is to the Gulf Coast states and coastal communities. In 2009, offshore oil and gas activity in the Gulf of Mexico generated almost $70 billion of economic value and nearly 400,000 jobs. That same year, the industry provided $20 billion in revenues to federal, state and local governments, making the industry one of the largest sources of revenue to the federal government.

Continued and expanded access to all areas of the Gulf of Mexico will increase these economic gains for Gulf Coast residents and ensure that the Gulf Coast continues to supply American consumers across the country with reliable crude oil, petroleum products and natural gas. Quest Offshore Resources has estimated that an increase in Gulf of Mexico offshore oil and gas activity could support 180,000 jobs across the Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana region, and Wood Mackenzie estimates that oil and gas development in the Eastern Planning Area could create 100,000 new jobs in Florida alone.

In addition, at a time when our national economy continues struggling to regain footing, it is also particularly important to note that opening the Atlantic for offshore energy exploration and production would create nearly 280,000 jobs throughout the country, according to Quest. These jobs would be located all across America, not just along the Atlantic. As an example of the huge economic benefits that result from offshore energy development, the region that is home to Port Fourchon in Southeast Louisiana, the service and supply hub for deepwater Gulf of Mexico activity, has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. In addition to direct and indirect jobs, expanding access in the Atlantic is estimated to result in $195 billion in new private investment; add about 1.3 million barrels of oil equivalent per day to domestic energy production, enhance our national security; and generate $51 billion in new revenue for federal and state governments.

For the benefit of citizens and businesses throughout the Gulf of Mexico, we respectfully urge the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to include all offshore planning areas during this initial phase.
Sincerely,

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Business Council of New Orleans & the River Region

George Swift  
President and CEO  
The Chamber of Southwest Louisiana

Nedra Davis  
Executive Director  
Chenier Plain Coastal Restoration and Protection Authority

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