



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### ***Attachments (2):***

- Group Letter to President Biden
- COA Factsheet: Marine Mammal Harassment Authorizations

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## **Unprecedented Numbers of Endangered Whales Wash-up in NJ/NY: *Ocean Groups Demand President Biden Conduct Transparent Investigation and Halt Offshore Wind Energy Activity***

**Atlantic City, NJ** – In response to an unprecedented six endangered whales in 33 days washing-up dead on beaches in the New Jersey/New York Ocean region, ocean advocacy groups led by Clean Ocean Action – including Protect Our Coast NJ, Save Long Beach Island, Defend Brigantine Beach, and the Long Island Commercial Fishing Association – are calling on U.S. President Biden to take immediate steps to address this alarming and environmentally harmful trend.

In a letter to President Biden the groups demand:

- 1) An immediate and fully transparent investigation into the recent whale deaths by federal agencies mandated by law to protect marine mammals, especially endangered species. This investigation must be undertaken with independent oversight by qualified, independent scientists to ensure rigorous scientific scrutiny and peer reviewed.
- 2) A hard stop on all existing offshore wind industry geotechnical and development activities.
- 3) A halt to any new, planned, or pending offshore wind development permitting activities, including new solicitations.

“The wave of dead whales is the ocean sounding the alarm,” said **Cindy Zipf, Executive Director of Clean Ocean Action**, “and we must heed the warning.”

“These tragic multiple deaths of mostly young, endangered whales are of no apparent cause, however, the only new activity in the ocean is the unprecedented concurrent industrial activity by over 11 companies in the region’s ocean, which allows the harassment and harm of tens of thousands of marine mammals. Moreover, federal and state agencies have been recklessly fast-tracking offshore wind development projects. These three coinciding factors raise suspicions, and a responsible and reasonable response is the action plan for which we are calling,” **Zipf** added.

Clean Ocean Action reviewed the federally-issued and pending requests by companies allowed to harass and harm marine mammals *just* for offshore wind energy development activities off the New York and New Jersey coast. To date in that area, companies have requested permission to harm tens of thousands of marine mammals, including threatened, endangered, and otherwise protected species through requests for Incidental Take Authorizations (ITAs) and Incidental Take Regulations (ITR) by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). According to Clean Ocean Action, there are 11 active, 5 current, and 18 previously issued and expired IHA and ITR authorizations in the ocean off the NY/NJ coast.

“By our calculations, there are over **157,328** marine mammals that offshore wind companies have been given the green light to harm, harass, injure and kill for current and pending offshore wind projects. These animals are not individually hit once, they may be the same animals subjected to impacts again and again with all the activity going on offshore,” said **Kari Martin, Advocacy Campaign Manager for Clean Ocean Action**. “That is an extraordinary number of animals to impact, especially for endangered, threatened, and protected species like the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale. How many more vulnerable marine mammals have to die without further action?”

Until the investigation is complete, the groups are also calling for a halt to all ongoing offshore wind survey boat and pre-construction and construction activities within the ocean realm between Cape May, NJ, and Montauk, NY, and demanding a full review of all offshore wind projects’ survey boat data by state and federal agencies and legislators in addition to review by an independent third-party panel of experts.

The groups’ demands come after a 30-foot humpback whale washed ashore on Atlantic City’s Georgia Ave. beach early Saturday morning, the second in two weeks in Atlantic City and the third in the last month in the same area. Another young humpback whale washed up on Atlantic City’s Chelsea Ave. beach on December 23, and a third 30-foot humpback was found on Strathmere beach in early December. Further north in the NY/NJ area, an infant sperm whale, 12-feet long, was found dead on the beach in Keansburg, NJ, on December 5<sup>th</sup>; an adult humpback female measuring 31-feet long was found on Indian Wells Beach in Amagansett, NY, on December 6<sup>th</sup>; and a 30-foot long sperm whale was found on New York’s Rockaway Beach on December 12<sup>th</sup>. In addition, a dead dolphin, possibly short-beaked, washed ashore on January 2, 2023, at Gateway National Recreation Area, Sandy Hook, NJ’s Plum Island beach.

Offshore wind developers have been actively employing multiple geotechnical survey vessels off the coast of the New Jersey and New York coast while awaiting permit approvals for large-scale offshore wind power plants. When completed, hundreds of 1,000-foot-tall wind turbine generators will be built in the ocean along with associated substations and thousands of miles of undersea cables.

The geotechnical survey boats use sea-floor characterization through high-level focused pulses of sound through vast areas of the ocean floor. Many whales hear and communicate in those frequencies, including humpbacks. Use of sonar at higher levels has been known to have harmful impacts on whales including deafening which can lead to starvation and death.

“The premature death of so many whales and other marine mammals is an untenable situation that we believe is most likely caused by the increase in vessel traffic and the ‘sounding’ or mapping of the ocean floor by several offshore wind project developers. Until we know for sure what is causing the extraordinary number of deaths all activity associated with offshore wind industry projects in the area must be stopped immediately,” said **Suzanne Hornick from Protect Our Coast NJ**. “We must have

scientific investigation and complete transparency of all government agencies involved with the industrialization of our ocean.” [Suzanne Hornick, mobile: 609-554-0146]

The groups’ call to action includes immediate public disclosure of wind farm survey boat logs, data, equipment and real-time sound data and activities for the Ocean Wind 1 and Atlantic Shores windfarms, including information on whale sightings, vessel strikes, near misses and avoidance details. Real-time and past-history survey boat tracking data must also be made public for all Ocean Wind 1 and Atlantic Shores windfarm and transmission cable survey vessels.

“The UMEs (Unusual Mortality Events) for Humpback, Minke and NARWs that began in 2017 coincided with the introduction of wind farm survey boats,” said **Bonnie Brady, Executive Director of the Long Island Commercial Fishing Association**. “More investigation and transparency is necessary to make sure our marine life isn’t a casualty of offshore wind development, and samples must be collected and preserved by NOAA scientists,” she added. [Bonnie Brady, mobile: (516) 527-3099]

Offshore wind energy developers are required to provide regular reports to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU) detailing whale protection methods and interactions, and public reports are required in NJDEP and NJBPU orders. To date, it is unclear whether any of this information or data has been made publicly or otherwise available.

“Save Long Beach Island fully supports Clean Ocean Action’s initiative for an immediate investigation and cessation of lease activities. We cautioned the National Marine Fisheries Service a year ago that they were significantly underestimating the noise impacts from vessel surveys on marine mammals. We hope that is not the cause of these deaths, but that can only be confirmed through a thorough, transparent and impartial investigation,” said **Bob Stern, President of Save Long Beach Island**. [Bob Stern, mobile: 917-952 5016]

“The wind farm development and approval process are critically lacking in adequate communication, sufficient time allowed for public understanding and input, and rigorous research which will result in the suffering of our economy, ecology, environment, marine mammals including endangered species, and the health and wellbeing of our residents,” said **Lisa Daidone, President of Defend Brigantine Beach**.

Clean Ocean Action invites organizations to sign-onto the letter to President Biden and will send the President a rolling list of supporters. COA will continue to take additional actions at the local, state, and federal levels to continue to call for a comprehensive, scientific, independent, peer-reviewed pilot study to assess the true costs and benefits and environmental consequences of offshore wind before massive industrialization occurs.

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