December \_\_\_\_, 2021

[Honorable First Name Last Name]

U.S. House of Representatives

Room Number, Building Name

Washington, DC 20515]

Dear Representative [Name]:

As a constituent, I am writing to express my concern about the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management’s (BOEM) upcoming wind energy lease sale in the Wilmington East Wind Energy Area off coastal North Carolina. While I am a resident of your Congressional District, I am also a homeowner in the Village of Bald Head Island, North Carolina, which is located about 15 miles due north of the area being prepared for lease.

I support renewable energy development, including offshore wind energy, but I am worried about the visual impacts of wind turbines on the Bald Head Island community. Bald Head Island is a resort community that depends on tourism for its economic well-being. I own a home there because of the natural beauty of the North Carolina beaches and unspoiled views – of both the ocean and the starry night sky. Wind turbines placed within 15 miles of our beaches will compromise this coastal viewshed. Seeing a large collection of huge wind turbines from our shoreline will detract from the reasons this place is so special.

Viewshed concerns with respect to wind turbines are not new to coastal North Carolina. Prior to the announcement of BOEM’s Kitty Hawk Wind Energy Area lease sale in 2017, the National Park Service successfully petitioned BOEM for a change to the initially proposed wind energy area, which would have directly impacted views from Bodie Island Lighthouse. Since 2015, the Village of Bald Head Island has been petitioning BOEM for the same treatment – to ensure that views are not directly impacted from the Village of Bald Head Island’s historic lighthouse on the national register – “Old Baldy” – the oldest lighthouse in the State of North Carolina. Specifically, we have requested that wind turbines are not placed within 24 nautical miles of shore.

Despite countless meetings with BOEM and multiple public comments filed in response to Federal Register notices, most recently in September 2021[[1]](#footnote-1), BOEM has yet to address the Village’s request head on and instead, has provided multiple responses to local concerns raised by the placement of both the Wilmington West Wind Energy Area and the Wilmington East Wind Energy Area. In 2016, in preparation for the Kitty Hawk lease, BOEM sent a letter to the Village noting that due to the two Wilmington Wind Energy Areas’ proximity to South Carolina, BOEM made the determination to move those two Wind Energy Areas into the planning and leasing process for the “South Carolina Call Area.” Former BOEM Director Abigail Hopper committed to the Village Mayor, Andy Sayre, that:

*BOEM will engage its North Carolina and South Carolina Task Forces, including the members representing Bald Head Island and other potentially affected communities, as we move forward. This will ensure that the new leasing strategy is implemented in a transparent manner and incorporates stakeholder concerns such as yours into our decision-making.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

However, very little engagement was forthcoming. In 2018, BOEM did commission a study from the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), the “North Carolina/South Carolina Offshore Wind Stakeholder Assessment,” to obtain feedback from the local community, including government officials, residents, and other affected stakeholders in North and South Carolina. A significant portion of the draft report cited local concerns related to viewsheds and made a variety of recommendations to BOEM with respect to engaging the local community to explore these concerns more fully. Not only did BOEM choose not to consider CBI’s recommendations, but the Agency also appears to have never finalized the draft report, as BOEM staff ignored numerous requests from the Village to provide a finalized version (and no document was ever published on the BOEM website).

This year, CBI facilitated a stakeholder meeting for BOEM’s newly created, “Carolina Long Bay Task Force,” to discuss the potential leasing of the two Wilmington Wind Energy Areas, without providing any rationale or explanation as to (1) why the previous plan to make those wind energy areas part of the South Carolina process was abandoned; (2) how the Carolina Task Force differs from the previous North Carolina Task Force and the South Carolina Task Force; or (3) what BOEM’s plan was to address ongoing viewshed concerns. During that stakeholder meeting, potential impact to views was repeatedly mentioned as a concern by participants and BOEM continued to ignore such concerns.

Now BOEM is preparing to move forward with a lease sale for Wilmington East, without acknowledging the change in policy previously communicated to the Village or the concerns from Bald Head and other local communities, and after taking no steps to work with the local community to find a solution. While we understand that the prospect of developing an offshore wind energy industry in North Carolina is important to the State, it should not be done at the expense of the residents most impacted by the process. At minimum, BOEM should be encouraged to work with the local community to find a solution and to consider a process that ensures turbines are placed at least 24 nautical miles offshore.

It is clearly possible for BOEM to address our visual impact concerns because the Agency has done so previously with respect to the National Park Service. But to date, the Agency has chosen to ignore our concerns. As both a constituent and a Bald Head Island homeowner, I respectfully request that you communicate these constituent concerns to BOEM and encourage BOEM to halt any lease sale until the Agency is willing to properly address the concerns of local North Carolina constituent communities.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[District Address]

1. See: https://www.regulations.gov/comment/BOEM-2021-0055-0023 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Letter from Director Abigail Ross Hopper, BOEM, to Mayor J. Andrew Sayre, Village of Bald Head Island (April 7, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)