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News Release



International Association of
Geophysical Contractors

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IAGC Offers Remedies for MMPA Problems in “Deficiencies in the Permitting Process for Offshore Seismic Research” House Natural Resources Committee Hearing

Houston, TX – January 19, 2018 – The International Association of Geophysical Contractors (IAGC) today in a House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources Oversight Hearing, “Deficiencies in the Permitting Process for Offshore Seismic Research” offered remedies for flaws and the misapplication of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of the 1970s and urged passage of the SECURE American Energy Act as a smart partial fix.

Speaking of the significant need for modernizing the MMPA because of the many problems in its application, Ryan Steen of Stoel Rives testifying on behalf of the IAGC said, “In the past decade, these problems have manifested in the form of routinely delayed permitting processes, inconsistent and misguided analyses of potential impacts, and opportunistic advocacy litigation intended to block or impede offshore development.”

Citing the findings of a recent Government Accountability Office report detailing how America's offshore energy potential has been undermined by "bureaucratic dysfunction", specifically investigating the processes and time frames for reviewing and approving seismic survey applications, Steen also said the manner in which key federal agencies have carried out their federal mandates are not in line with the intent of Congress when it directed the “expeditious and orderly development” of the nation’s Outer Continental Shelf under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OSCLA).

Steen went on to point out that despite fallacious allegations by environmental advocacy organizations, in the more than 50-year history of seismic operations in U.S. waters, to date the scientific record continues to confirm seismic survey activities have had nothing more than a negligible impact on marine mammal species. This finding has been repeatedly substantiated by federal agency scientists in numerous public documents over the years.

Among the IAGC’s seven key recommendations to modernize the MMPA, are clearly defining vague or ambiguous terms such as “negligible impact” and “small numbers” as well as redefining overly broad terms such as “harassment.” Steen also offered procedural recommendations such as setting clear and firm deadlines for each stage of the permitting process and establishing and implementing consequences for agencies when those deadlines are not met.

Finally, Steen reinforced the IAGC's endorsement of the SECURE American Energy Act introduced by Representative Steve Scalise (LA). "The bill would not, as has been suggested, eliminate mitigation requirements or reduce substantive protections for marine mammals. Rather, the bill helps to accomplish what any reasonable person would expect of a federal regulatory program: transparent standards; firm timelines; efficient process; and elimination of redundancy. Indeed, the only basis for opposing this bill would be an antagonism to efficient federal processes and a desire for the ambiguities and inefficiencies that create opportunities for delay and litigation," Steen said.

Seismic and other geophysical surveys have been safely conducted in the U.S. and around the globe extensively for more than 50 years. Geophysical surveys are critical to informing policy makers and regulators with the information they need to make knowledgeable decisions based on the best available data in the "expeditious and orderly development" of the nation's oil and gas resources as mandated by OCSLA.

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About the IAGC

The [IAGC](#) represents more than 110 member companies worldwide from all segments of the geophysical industry and is the only trade organization solely dedicated to representing the industry. It is the leader in geophysical technical and operations expertise and for more than 45 years, the IAGC has worked to optimize the business and regulatory climate and enhances public understanding to support a strong, viable geophysical industry essential to discovering and delivering the world's energy resources.

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