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MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

IAGC: New website highlights 1,200 days of regulatory delay stemming from an outdated MMPA

Houston, Texas, US – Friday, November 9th marks the 1,200th day of government delay and inaction on Atlantic Incidental Harassment Authorizations (IHAs) for seismic surveys off the U.S. East Coast. This delay comes after the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries conducted a thorough review and exhausted a 120-day decision period without taking action or issuing a decision. The International Association of Geophysical Contractors (IAGC) has launched a new website, ModernizeMMPA.com, to educate U.S. citizens about this and other problems created by the outdated Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

“The U.S. geophysical industry has been waiting for a decision on IHA applications for over three (3) years, despite the fact that the MMPA requires agencies to make decisions on the applications within 120 days after the review process, including extensive environmental analysis, is complete,” said Nikki Martin, President of the IAGC. “The IAGC is launching this website to bring attention to the inexplicable delay on these applications caused by the MMPA. Steps must be taken to reduce bureaucratic delay and cut the burdensome regulatory red tape holding back the energy exploration industry.”

During the 1,200-day delay NOAA has granted authorization for numerous seismic research surveys in the Atlantic OCS. Scientific research seismic surveys have been conducted in the Atlantic OCS over the past 50 years, with the most recent ones occurring in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. During this time, there were no reports of injury or even of significant disturbance to marine life.

The IAGC is disappointed with the unnecessary and burdensome impact of the MMPA. The vague language in the statute allows unelected bureaucrats to ignore the law, singling out energy exploration applications by not issuing decisions all while approving IHAs for research, alternative energy and other offshore activities.

The MMPA was enacted in 1972 to help protect marine mammal species that were in decline as a result of human activities such as overhunting, overfishing and unscrupulous trade. But the Act has been co-opted by organizations that seek to use its ambiguity as a tool for curtailing offshore energy exploration and development.

Seismic surveying technology has been used extensively for over 50 years around the world, with no known detrimental impact to marine life, commercial fishing or tourism. Seismic surveying activity is a critical component of responsible energy resource development and contributes to reducing the overall environmental footprint associated with energy exploration. Seismic surveying also assists in the planning and installation of offshore renewable facilities and provides valuable data on the dynamic processes that shape our coasts.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has found that “To date, there has been no documented scientific evidence of noise from acoustic sources used in seismic activities adversely affecting marine animal populations or coastal communities.”

Nevertheless, the current regulatory process functions as a de facto ban on energy exploration in some U.S. waters. Now, the U.S. is falling behind in seismic information gathering, exploration activity and energy development due to the bureaucratic delays caused by the vague language and broken regulatory processes in the MMPA. Since 2014, Mexico has leased over 21,000,000 acres of offshore area for exploration and production in the Gulf of Mexico, more than four times the acreage leased by the U.S. Meanwhile, the U.S. is the only Atlantic margin country that is not exploring its shores for oil and gas resources.

The IAGC, through our Modernize MMPA site and campaign, urges lawmakers and regulators to help bring MMPA into the 21st Century by enacting common sense modifications.

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About the IAGC

The IAGC represents more than 110-member companies worldwide from all segments of the geophysical and exploration industry and is the only trade organization solely dedicated to representing the industry. It is the leader in geophysical technical and operations expertise. 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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