

Planning for New Jersey's Ocean Future

By Carmen Amato, Mayor, Berkeley Township

In January of this year, Berkeley Township and the Ocean County Mayors' Association both passed resolutions strongly opposing offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling activities, which could endanger the health and well-being of the Jersey Shore's communities, environment, and thriving economy.

Our reasons for passing these resolutions are many.

New Jersey residents know our oceans and coastlines are special; hundreds of species of fish and birds, plus whales, dolphins, seals, and some endangered species call them home. Offshore oil and gas development would threaten our wildlife and waters with habitat damage, day-to-day air and water pollution, harmful noise from seismic testing, and the potential for catastrophic oil spills similar to the BP Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

The economic impact of offshore oil and gas activities should also not be underestimated.

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New Jersey's 127 miles of scenic coastline, hundreds of miles of back-bays, estuaries, and other waterways support a crucial tourism industry that brings in more than \$32 million each year and provides more than 500,000 jobs. Our marine resources also support recreational and commercial fishing businesses and activities that contribute more than \$2 billion in added value to New Jersey's economy.

Oil and gas development directly impacts these industries and many more.

The bottom line: as the Mayor of Berkeley Township, I can tell you that when we look at the future of New Jersey's ocean, it should not include oil rigs.

Instead, we are working to advance better stewardship of our oceans through forward-thinking, solution-based strategies, such as supporting the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan. We feel regional planning for new and emerging uses in our shared waters, such as offshore wind development or sand mining, is vital to help ensure that all users' and stakeholders' voices can be part of the planning process.

That's why we are proud to have been the first New Jersey municipality to pass a resolution supporting the ocean planning effort.

Regional ocean planning is a process that looks at the entire picture of how we use, manage, and conserve the ocean and coasts in the Mid-Atlantic. It brings together representatives from Mid-Atlantic states, federally recognized tribes, the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, and eight federal agencies with ocean interests, in order to improve information sharing, tackle common problems, and create a shared vision for a healthy ocean. Guided by this process, this regional body developed the Regional Ocean Action Plan in 2016 and is now overseeing its implementation.

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan creates benefits with pooled data and information from local, state, and federal sources on the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal. This shared resource allows us to view how we use our ocean resource holistically, by identifying overlaps and potential conflicts between sectors early in the process. It also encourages those who have a stake in the outcome to share ideas and expertise with each other to create better solutions to mutual problems.

The most effective way to collectively create the best plan for all of our communities, the blue economy, and a healthy ocean is to support the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan. Our waters are a common, interconnected resource we all must manage responsibly, and only with coordinated and consistent policies can we address the issues and threats that affect our entire region.

In addition to Berkeley Township, Asbury Park, Bradley Beach, Lavallette, and Long Beach have all passed resolutions to support the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan; we are calling on you to join us. The American Littoral Society provides resources to explain how regional ocean planning can directly benefit our businesses, economy, environment, and residents.

Since every community is different, the reasons you need regional ocean planning may vary. But no matter the reason, it's important for all of us to get onboard with the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan. By working together, we can make New Jersey's coastlines healthier and more prosperous for all of our residents. 🦋

Carmen F. Amato, Jr., is Mayor of Berkeley Township.

The views expressed and the data presented by contributors are theirs and are not necessarily shared by the League.