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Testimony on:  
**S.448**, *An Act protecting our coasts from offshore drilling*

Before the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture

June 7, 2019

Dear Chairwoman Gobi and Chairman Pignatelli,

Mass Audubon thanks the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture for the opportunity to provide testimony **in support of S.448**, which would limit the harmful impacts of offshore oil and gas drilling along Massachusetts' coasts. The bill would limit or prohibit state-level approvals and activities related to offshore drilling, making it more difficult for federal drilling projects to move forward off our coasts.

Mass Audubon strongly opposes the US Department of the Interior's plan to expand offshore oil and gas leasing to encompass about 90% of US coastlines. The exploration, development, and production of oil and gas – not to mention the potential for catastrophic oil spills – off the Massachusetts Outer Continental Shelf would have severe impacts on fisheries, wildlife habitat, and geological resources. Massachusetts and all of New England depend on a thriving coastal and ocean economy – which brings in \$17.5 billion annually to the region – and that success in turn depends on healthy coastal and ocean ecosystems.

It would be a grave mistake to place our valuable natural resources at risk, especially when so much progress and economic growth is occurring through energy efficiency and development of clean, renewable energy. This energy shift is also crucial in our fight against climate change. The proposed expansion would also be inconsistent with the Massachusetts Ocean Management Plan.

There are four areas in particular that we are especially concerned could be impacted:

- Nearshore areas within 100 miles of the Massachusetts coast – the 1,500-mile coastline of the Bay State constitutes an environmentally-sensitive and fragile marine environment that contributes substantially to the **tourism and recreational economies** of Massachusetts.
- Georges Bank – once one of the world's most productive fishing grounds for Atlantic cod, haddock, and flounder, much of the Bank is currently closed to fishing to allow the area to recover from destructive bottom-trawl fishing, and any disruption caused by

drilling will **severely disrupt those restoration efforts** and jeopardize future sustainability.

- Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary – located between Cape Ann and Cape Cod, this area provides **feeding and nursery grounds** for more than a dozen cetacean species including the endangered humpback, northern right, and fin whales; supports foraging activity by diverse seabird species; feeding areas for endangered Leatherback and Kemp’s ridley sea turtles; and seasonal populations of fish like include bluefin tuna, herring, cod, lobster, and scallops.
- Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Marine Monument – this nearly 5,000-square-mile ecosystem includes three underwater canyons deeper than the Grand Canyon, and four underwater mountains (extinct volcanoes) known as “seamounts” that are **biodiversity hotspots** and home to many rare and endangered species. These include thousand-year-old deep sea corals found nowhere else on Earth and other rare fish and invertebrates.

While a federal judge recently upheld permanent protection for certain areas of the Atlantic Ocean, along with nearly all of the Arctic Ocean, against the drilling expansion, the federal government is appealing that decision. Even in the case of another court victory, much of the Atlantic Ocean is still at risk from expanded drilling. **S.448** would provide an added layer of protection to lessen that risk.

Most of our neighboring New England states are considering similar legislation, and if enacted, these bills collectively could help protect the entire region from offshore drilling related activity in state waters.

We urge you to consider the environmental and local economic benefits of this bill and report it out favorably. Thank you for taking the time to review our comments.

Sincerely,

Mike Cusher  
Legislative Director

cc: Members of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture