

# US opens door to East Coast offshore oil and gas drilling

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A fin whale surfaces near offshore oil rigs off the southern California coast on January 29, 2012 near Long Beach, California

The United States on Friday opened the way to offshore oil and gas exploration in the Atlantic Ocean, authorizing the controversial use of sonic cannons for seismic surveys.

Exploration off the US East Coast has been banned since the early

1980s, largely because of environmental concerns. The use of sonic waves, whose noise levels are magnified under water, risks harm to [marine life](#).

The US Bureau of Ocean Energy Management said in a statement it was "establishing the highest practicable level of mitigation measures and safeguards to reduce or eliminate impacts to marine life while setting a path forward for appropriate geological and geophysical (G&G) survey activities... to update 40-year old data on the region's offshore resources."

The decision does not authorize any G&G activities, but establishes a "framework" for additional reviews for sites when it considers permit applications for those activities, the BOEM said.

The move opens up seismic surveys in the Atlantic off the eastern seaboard from Delaware to Florida.

The American Petroleum Institute, which has been pushing for the resumption of exploration and production in the Atlantic, welcomed the BOEM's decision to issue permits.

But the industry lobby, in a statement, expressed concern about "the lack of scientific support for certain requirements the administration wants to impose on seismic surveys in the Atlantic" that it said could discourage exploration.

Oceana, a nonprofit group dedicated to protecting oceans, slammed the limited protections of marine life as too weak.

The move by President Barack Obama's administration authorizes the use of "dynamite-like blasts" to search for oil and gas deposits deep below the ocean floor in an area twice the size of California, the NGO

said.

"While the decision includes limited protections for species like the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale, of which there are less than 500 left worldwide... They do not go far enough to combat the threats posed to fisheries, economies and marine mammals," Oceana said in a statement.

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