Dear Congresswoman Kiggans,

Thank you for your office's work urging BOEM to extend the public comment period for its Virginia offshore minerals RFI. The extension through August 22 has provided valuable additional time, but the comments submitted to date reveal a clear and growing concern: this proposal presents too many risks and unanswered questions to advance toward leasing. BOEM confirms that the RFI could inform a competitive lease sale for heavy mineral sands and phosphorites off Virginia's coast.

Opposition and concern are especially strong among communities and economic interests in Virginia's Second District:

- Accomack County opposes advancing the proposal, while Northampton County opposes leasing unless comprehensive analyses demonstrate that it would create no unacceptable risks.
- The Town of Chincoteague has expressed strong opposition, and the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission has raised concerns about seafood, aquaculture, national defense, shipping, and working-waterfront economies.
- On August 18, the Virginia Beach City Council received a briefing on the proposal and decided to formally oppose BOEM moving forward with offshore mineral leasing off Virginia's coast. This action reflects the significant environmental, economic, military, and operational concerns facing the region.
- The Virginia Spaceport Authority does not support advancing the leasing effort, citing potential conflicts with space launches, national security activities, maritime safety, and Virginia's long-term investment in Wallops and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport.
- Commercial fishermen, shellfish growers, recreational anglers, charter captains, seafood businesses, and tourism operators have warned that seabed disturbance, sediment plumes, habitat loss, water-quality impacts, and operational conflicts could threaten established livelihoods throughout coastal Virginia.

Ocean Harvesters' comment is particularly significant. Using documented catch records, the company reported that approximately 12% of its annual menhaden catch occurs within the proposed RFI area and another 50% occurs in adjacent Virginia waters that could also experience disruption. Although Ocean Harvesters stopped short of outright opposition, it explained that BOEM has provided too little information about where, when, and how mining would occur to identify precautions capable of protecting its fishery. That is a powerful illustration of the proposal's current inadequacy.

These concerns extend well beyond the environmental community. They come from local governments, seafood producers, anglers, watermen, charter businesses, tourism operators, maritime interests, state resource agencies, and the Commonwealth's spaceport authority. Existing economic and national-security interests are being asked to accept substantial uncertainty for an offshore industry that has never operated commercially in U.S. federal waters.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask that you submit a formal comment urging BOEM not to advance this proposal toward leasing. We also encourage your office to continue engaging directly with affected VA-02 stakeholders, including local governments, fishing and aquaculture businesses, recreational anglers, charter captains, tourism operators, maritime interests, and the Virginia Spaceport Authority.

With Virginia Beach now joining other coastal communities formally opposing this proposal, the message from the district is increasingly clear: there is too much at stake and too much uncertainty for BOEM to move forward. Lynnhaven River NOW would be glad to brief your staff and help connect your office with affected stakeholders across the district.

Thank you again for your attention to this issue and for your continued service to coastal Virginia.

Sincerely,

Dylan Mason // Public Policy Manager // Lynnhaven River NOW