

GFWA Opposes LNG Facility

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In the past month, both the Gloucester Daily Times and the Boston Globe have informed the public that Excelerate Energy, Limited Partnership, a one -year-old energy company, is proposing to build an unloading facility for liquefied natural gas (LNG) in offshore waters. The facility they are proposing will be the first of its kind in the world. The company asserts that this facility will have a minimal effect on the underwater ecosystem fishermen depend on and will present no danger to the public-at-large. As President of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association, my question is, "How do they know?" Especially, given that they have very little experience and no track record with this kind of facility.

There are reasons why the public needs to oppose the building of such a facility so close to human populations and in historically productive fishing grounds.

The first reason to oppose this project is safety. If LNG tanks rupture over water from collisions, negligence or terrorism, the super-cooled liquid methane rapidly heats to water temperature and turns into a gas. The gas quickly expands over 600 times and forms a vapor cloud. Sources have reported that the Coast Guard modeling has shown that an ignitable vapor cloud could spread more than 25 miles. According to the 2002 guide for building offshore LNG terminals almost anything could serve as an ignition source at this point including vessels, electrical equipment, mobile phones, cameras, static electricity and lightning.

The only offshore LNG facility in the world is scheduled to go into operation next year offshore Louisiana and it is positioned more than 110 miles off the coast and away from populations. In California, objections have been raised to LNG facilities offshore which according to one estimate could put 70,000 people at risk. Massachusetts should not dismiss these safety concerns simply based on assurances from the developers. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has announced that it will hold off approving any new LNG projects until its LNG Safety Report comes out, probably by the end of the year.

The second reason this project should be opposed is that it will become a major disruption to critical fishing grounds near Stellwagen Bank. The area that Excelerate Energy wants to establish this unloading facility in is only 10 miles from Gloucester, in an 800 sq mile area (30 by 27-miles) on Stellwagen Bank known as Block 125. Both commercial and recreational fishing, as well as lobstering, takes place here. For centuries, this area has been one of the most productive fishing grounds for our fishermen on Stellwagen Bank. Already there is talk of vessel exclusion zones of one to three miles around the LNG tankers when they are unloading at either of the two unloading buoys. When vessel traffic becomes congested with additional tankers waiting to unload, will fishing vessels be required to leave the entire area?

Since the passage of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the number of days that commercial fishermen can fish has been reduced dramatically and fishing grounds have been closed for part of the year in order to protect both the fish and the ocean habitat. On Stellwagen Bank, for the last seven years, Block 125 has been closed to fishing for seven months of the year in order to preserve the integrity of fish stocks. At present, it is closed four months of the year to protect spawning fish and because it has been designated an essential fish habitat. If this project goes forward, fishermen will no longer be able to fish there at all and the conservation efforts and fishing industry sacrifices that have taken place over the last 3 decades by fishing communities will have been for nothing.

Also, the proposed facility in Block 125 is one mile from the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. In 1986, both commercial and recreational fishing industry advocates lobbied to protect Stellwagen Bank by having part of it declared a Marine Sanctuary. This facility will be located right next door! The LNG tankers that will be unloading nearly 365 days of the year will be one thousand

feet long or the equivalent of more than three football fields. The Gloucester fishing fleet is made up of small boats 30ft to 60 ft in length most of which fish primarily on or near Stellwagen Bank. How will they be protected from being split down the middle in good or bad weather by these enormous tankers? The tankers will not even know that they hit them.

The third reason to oppose this project is that the pipeline construction will disrupt the ecosystem. Lobstermen have already seen the guarantees of minimal impacts from the Hubline project vanish when construction fell behind schedule. Problems were encountered on the seafloor which were not anticipated by the companies. This will almost certainly happen again if they are allowed to move forward on this gas pipeline.

Is it not ironic that fishing vessels, such as draggers and scallopers, are constantly accused of destroying the ocean bottom with their fishing gear but trenching a path large enough to bury 11.5 miles of pipeline on the ocean bottom is not considered destructive of the habitat?

Is it not ironic that lobstermen and gillnetters must bring up their pots or nets if a whale is spotted so the whales don't get caught in them but LNG tankers can travel freely throughout areas where whales feed with no thought for the possible impact of these huge tankers on the whale population?

Is it not ironic that commercial fishermen must get permission each day from NOAA to use the fishing grounds and can be denied access to them but multimillionaires who have the resources can propose such a project with no thought given to the preservation of the ocean as a resource, the possible danger to local communities, or the destruction of people's livelihoods?

In conclusion, fish are a renewable resource that with proper attention can be there forever. In recent years, the commercial fishing industry has been reduced drastically in order to preserve the Atlantic Ocean for future generations. Natural gas is a finite resource and will someday be depleted leaving only debris and contamination in its wake.

It is our responsibility to supply the nation and the world with fish for food, so it is our responsibility to protect the ocean that gives us that food and to remember that it is a renewable and fragile resource. This is why the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association invites all in the community to join with us in opposing this project.