

Ministero dell'Ambiente
Direzione per la Salvaguardia Ambientale del Ministero dell'Ambiente e della
Tutela del Territorio e del Mare - Divisione III
Attenzione: Concessione d364 CR AX - Audax Energy
Via Cristoforo Colombo, 44
00147 - Roma

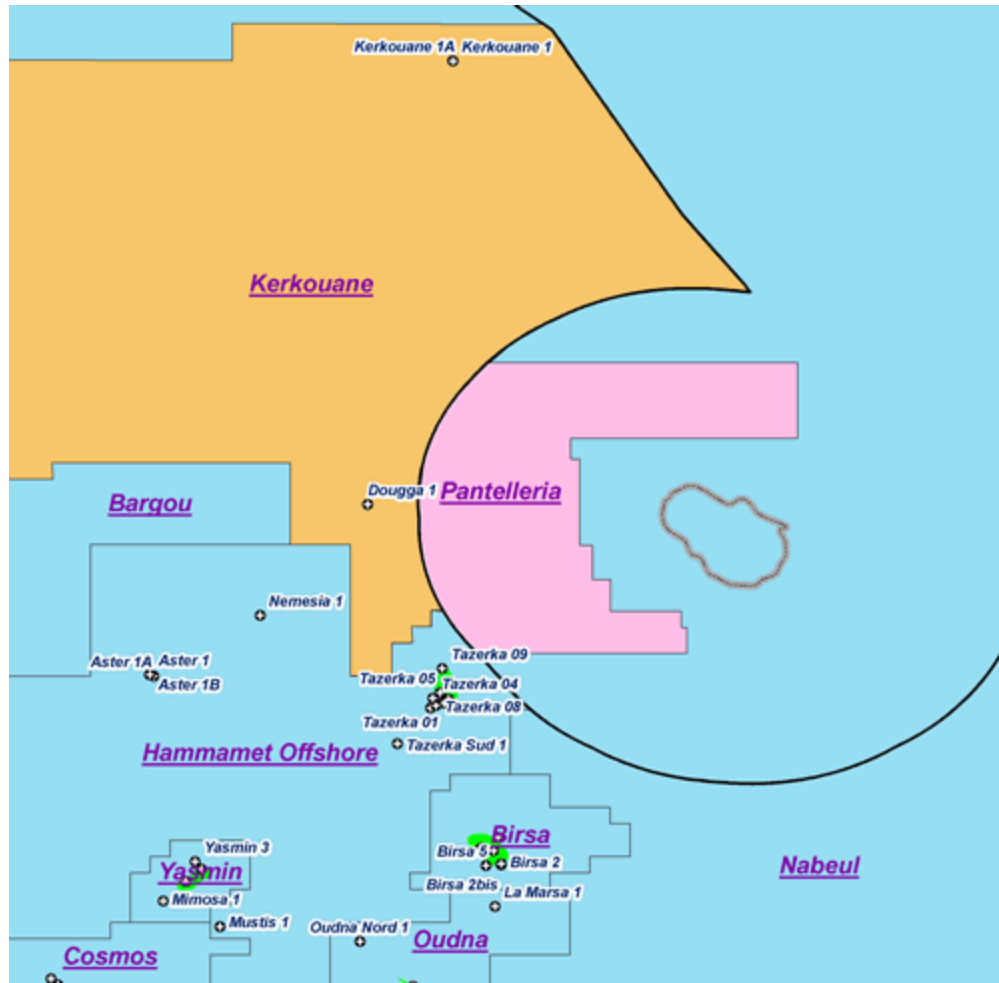
e p.c. : Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali
Direzione Generale per la Qualità e la Tutela del Paesaggio e l'Arte
Contemporanea
Via San Michele, 22
00153 - Roma

St. Paul, Minnesota, August 24th, 2011

Dear representatives of the Italian government:

I am writing to you to recommend that you deny authorization to the drilling permit d364 CR AX off the island of Pantelleria, Sicily as filed to your office by Audax Energy, based in Perth, Australia. These permits would allow an Australian company to perform seismic explorations and drill the Sicilian coast for what most likely will be heavy sour oil. The lease is located about 25 km from shore in one of the most beautiful seas of the Mediterranean, creating unnecessary risks and exposing the area to pollution and spills.

As Audax Energy mentions in its environmental report, oil exploration requires massive seismic testing - which threatens whales and dolphins. More to the point, seismic testing is used by oil and gas companies to explore the ocean floor for oil and gas sediments. In order to measure these sediments, large ships fire high-intensity air guns deep into the ocean. These "air cannons" produce a high intensity, low frequency noise and are dragged behind boats for thousands of miles in a systematic procedure to map an entire area. Air cannons are designed to be extremely loud - reaching up to 270 decibels (for reference, a nuclear explosion can be about 300-310 decibels underwater) and have been



The area to be drilled by Audax Energy - shown in pink

recorded by scientists from locations over 1,800 miles away. While there are many natural ocean noises, the excessive noise generated by air cannons masks those natural sounds, which are used by marine animals to hunt, navigate, feed and find mates. The sound energy from these air cannons is potentially damaging to many species of marine life, including whales, dolphins and seals.

Any sound over 180 decibels is believed to be harmful to marine life. Multiple scientific studies show links between such seismic testing and disruption of sea habitats, deaths of animals and the washing onshore of baby dolphins and other sea creatures. If successful, seismic testing will be followed by offshore drilling of preliminary and then permanent wells, which will be clearly visible from shore,

polluting chemicals will be used, large quantities of waste waters will have to be transported and treated onshore, and fishing activities will be affected. Most likely, industrial facilities will have to be built on land, turning a touristic place into an oil processing location. The people who live along the coast of Pantelleria stand to gain very little in return, since the oil will be sold on the open market and since Italian royalties are among the lowest in the world - about 4% of all profits, which will mostly end up in Roman coffers.

We have all seen the devastation caused by the massive BP oil spill in Louisiana one year ago and prior to that of the lesser known, but still devastating explosion in Australia, where the Montara oil rig released millions of gallons oil uncontrollably for more than two months. Similarly, these days there have been massive oil spills in Bohai bai, China and in the North Sea, off the coasts of Scotland. It would be a pity if similar events spoiled the beautiful coasts of Pantelleria. We urge the Ministry for the Environment to follow the directive of the European Commissioner for energy, Gunther Oettinger, who on July 7th 2010, proposed a moratorium on all deepwater drilling throughout Europe.

Having visited Louisiana a number of times over the course of my academic career as a mathematician, and for many years having closely followed the environmental challenges faced in the United States, I am keenly aware of the dangers of off shore drilling and the need for energy production from renewable resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Chad M. Hixson-Topaz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Chad Topaz
Associate Professor of Mathematics
Macalester College
St. Paul, MN
USA

