

December 12, 2003

Ocean Management Task Force
Attn.: Susan Tierney, Chair

Dear Ms. Tierney:

Below please find a copy of my letter that was published by the Cape Cod Times. I would hope the Ocean Management Task Force will consider its argument in its deliberations.

September 2, 2003

Cape Cod Times
Hyannis, MA

To the Editor:

As a physician who worked on the Cape for many years seeing patients and leading various environmental initiatives, I am alarmed at how little understanding there seems to be about the human risks of global warming, how the Cape Wind project has been so irresponsibly misrepresented, and how, as a result, people on the Cape and Islands may pass up an opportunity that would help preserve both their environment and their health. I am particularly alarmed at how some politicians, celebrities, business people, and environmentalists who should know better are placing their political and parochial interests above those of the common good.

Just what is at stake here?

1. The record increase in average global temperatures over the past century and the associated changes in global climate are caused mainly by our excessive burning of fossil fuels. This fact is no longer the subject of any serious debate.

2. These climatic changes have resulted in alterations of the Earth's physical and biological systems that have already had profound impacts on human health and well being.

These include:

Torrential rains and flooding in some areas, drought in others, and more violent storms, causing drownings and traumatic injuries, and affecting water supplies, agriculture, and property.

Increased sea levels, resulting in greater storm surges and the erosion and flooding of coastal lands

Heat waves such as that which killed over 14,800 people this summer in France alone

Worsening air pollution, triggering asthma attacks and causing sickness and death in those with chronic heart and lung disease

The emergence and spread of some human infectious diseases, as the carriers of these diseases--mosquitoes and ticks-reproduce more rapidly and move into areas that had previously been too cold for them. Lyme Disease and West Nile Virus Disease may be examples of infections affected by climate change.

And the widespread damage to species and ecosystems on land and in the oceans, including marine life and bird

populations, driving some species to extinction.

3. The changes we have seen to date are the result of an average warming of the Earth's surface over the past century by only about 1 degree Fahrenheit. What will happen if the Earth warms by over 10 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the worst case scenario (if we do not change our ways) predicted by the international scientific community for the year 2100? To put this in context, 10 degrees Fahrenheit is the amount the planet has warmed since the end of the last ice age 20,000 years ago, when much of New England was under a glacier one mile thick.

If we do not begin to curb our appetites for fossil fuels and start practicing significant energy conservation measures for our homes, buildings, vehicles, and appliances, and if we do not embrace major renewable energy projects like Cape Wind (that could become a model for others in the U.S. and abroad), then global warming and climate change will continue to accelerate at great rates and life as we know it could become intolerable in coming decades. The fragile environment of the Cape and Islands and the health of its citizens would be at particular risk.

I believe that those who oppose this project have not understood what is at stake. The view of small turbines on the horizon, the minor inconvenience for some boat owners, and the possible impacts on wildlife all pale by comparison with what awaits us if we do not significantly reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases, starting now.

If we defeat the Cape Wind project, we will have foreclosed an important first step towards protecting our children's health and the health of their environment, and we will have made a tragic and shamefully ignorant mistake.

Eric Chivian M.D.
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Center for Health and the Global Environment
Harvard Medical School

Shared 1985 Nobel Peace Prize for co-founding
International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

Dr. Chivian lived year round on Cape Cod from 1971-1977, running the Provincetown Drop-In Center (a medical clinic) and serving as the Chair of the Wellfleet Pesticide Commission.

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PLEASE NOTE NEW ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBERS

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The Mission of the Center for Health and the Global Environment is to study and

to promote a wider understanding of the human health consequences of global environmental change.

The Center believes that people will protect the natural environment when they realize its importance to their health, and to the health and lives of their children.