



Monterey Bay Aquarium

886 CANNERY ROW
MONTEREY, CA 93940
831.648.4800

October 19, 2016

Dr. Kathryn Sullivan
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans & Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Re: Support to begin designation process for Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary

Dear Administrator Sullivan:

I am writing on behalf of Monterey Bay Aquarium to urge the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to commence the designation process for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (Chumash Sanctuary) by the end of this year. On October 5, 2015, NOAA added the Chumash Sanctuary to the inventory of successful nominations, but NOAA has yet to begin the designation process. The area off the Southern California coast proposed for sanctuary designation includes unique and significant natural and cultural resources that would be valuable additions to the National Marine Sanctuary System. This designation would also strengthen our legacy of ocean conservation in California.

To help fulfill our mission to inspire conservation of the ocean, one of the Aquarium's priorities is to advance actions that conserve marine wildlife and protect the ocean and coastal ecosystems on which they depend. California has become a global leader for such protection as home to four national marine sanctuaries and a state-managed network of 125 marine protected areas. The proposed location of the Chumash Sanctuary would cover a gap between Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary to the north and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary to the south. If designated, the Chumash Sanctuary would join the other California sanctuaries to form a contiguous corridor of ocean and coastal management and protection, while still allowing compatible uses.

The proposed Chumash Sanctuary is a hotspot of productivity and biodiversity that supports critical habitats, including nursery and feeding grounds for threatened, endangered and commercially important species. It is home to almost one-third of the southern sea otter population in California, which is highly vulnerable to potential oil spills. It is also a migratory channel for a multitude of cetaceans, such as humpback and blue whales, dolphins, and the vulnerable Morrow Bay harbor porpoise.

In addition to its ecological significance, the proposed Chumash Sanctuary is also a region rich in cultural and archaeological heritage spanning at least 15,000 years. It is home to a number of submerged cultural artifacts of the Chumash—called the “first people” and one of the few ocean-going tribes of the Pacific coast. The area is also known as the “Graveyard of the Pacific,” with more than 40 known historic shipwrecks.



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We are proud to be the home of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, which has helped shine a spotlight on the amazing marine life and ecosystems we have in Monterey Bay. More importantly, the sanctuary helps manage and protect these resources, which drive our regional economy and are a source of pride for our residents and visitors alike. The proposed Chumash Sanctuary can bestow the same benefits on the local community in San Luis Obispo County. Like Monterey Bay Sanctuary, it can also serve as a symbol of our nation's commitment to improving the health of our ocean for the benefit of current and future generations.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge NOAA to start the designation process for the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Packard".

Julie Packard
Executive Director

cc:

John Armor, Director, NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

William Douros, West Coast Regional Director, NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries