

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 31, 2021

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Richard W. Spinrad
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue N.W., Room 5128
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo and Administrator Spinrad:

We write in support of the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary and ask that you initiate the designation process to move this nomination forward. This nomination has continued to gather wide community support since the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) approved the proposal in 2015 and most recently during NOAA's most recent review in 2020. Located between Monterey Bay and Channel Islands marine sanctuaries, the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is the result of a robust and inclusive public process. Final designation would protect invaluable and diverse marine resources off the Central Coast of California, essential to California's \$1.7 trillion coastal economy.

In the August 10, 2021 *Readout of White House America the Beautiful Interagency Working Group*, members of the federal interagency working group articulated goals for President Biden's initiative to conserve and restore at least 30 percent of our nation's lands and waters by 2030. As excerpted from the readout, NOAA's Assistant Administrator Nicole LeBeouf stated, "NOAA's continuing efforts [also] include expanding the National Marine Sanctuary System, with a focus on designating new sanctuaries that align with the Administration's goals to address nature loss, climate change, and equity, including through enhanced engagement with underserved and tribal communities." The Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary meets all of the Administration's goals.

The waters off the Central Coast of California are some of the most biologically diverse and ecologically productive regions in the world. This spectacular marine environment includes feeding grounds for numerous species of whales and dolphins, sea otter populations, kelp forests, and is home to vital commercial and recreational fisheries. Designating this area as a marine sanctuary would ensure we continue to be good stewards of these natural resources, while maintaining sustainable access for commercial and recreational fishing. The designation would also provide much-needed assistance in conserving California's kelp forests and rehabilitating other endangered marine life, including abalone.

Additionally, as outlined in the nomination submitted by the Northern Chumash Tribal Council, these waters are essential to the heritage of the Chumash, one of the few ocean-going bands among the First People of the Pacific Coast. Indigenous communities have always been a part of the marine ecosystem, and the Chumash people's historical memories and knowledge are

key to conservation moving forward. This designation would also protect submerged historical and cultural resources, including 40 known historic shipwrecks in the region. The area contains the Navy's worst peacetime loss shipwrecks, the gold-laden steamship S.S. Yankee Blade and the oil tanker, S.S. Montebello. A sanctuary designation will ensure we preserve these distinctive natural treasures that are of special historic, cultural, and archaeological significance.

Right now, our oceans and our communities are facing unprecedented challenges from a changing marine environment. From warming ocean waters, to increased threats of new offshore oil drilling, it is clear we need to act to protect these valuable resources that help grow our economy. NOAA's own studies show California's coastal waters warming at a faster rate than the global average, and severe threat to marine ecosystems due to ocean acidification and habitat loss. Designating this region as a national marine sanctuary would enshrine protections against oil drilling for a region that has first-hand experience of devastation from oil spills off the Santa Barbara coast in both 1969 and again in 2015.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. Once again, we urge you to move the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary nomination and advance it through NOAA's designation process. Please do not hesitate to contact us or have your staff reach out to ours should you have any questions. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this and many other marine issues.

Sincerely,



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



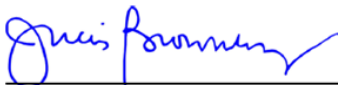
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



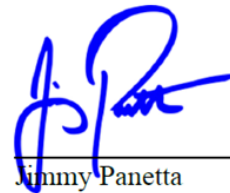
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress