

WRITTEN STATEMENT

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Before the
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans
Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Hearing on Reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act

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University of California at Santa Barbara

Chairwoman Bordallo, Representative Capps, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, my name is Julie Packard and I am Executive Director of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. I also served as a member of the Pew Oceans Commission and currently participate in the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, which continues to advance a new agenda for protecting and restoring our oceans. I am here today on behalf of the aquarium to testify on the need to strengthen the National Marine Sanctuaries Act and lift the moratorium on the designation of new sanctuaries.

We're standing on the shores of one of the most remarkable ecosystems on Earth. Indeed, the Pacific Coastal ocean is on the map of every global conservation organization as a center of natural diversity. This piece of ocean is what inspired our family nearly 30 years ago to found the Monterey Bay Aquarium now widely acclaimed as the leading aquarium in the nation. Our aquarium focuses nearly exclusively on Monterey Bay, and since opening, we have introduced more than 40 million people to the marine wildlife and natural communities of Monterey Bay. Each year, nearly two million people from all over the world come to experience our exhibits, from the living kelp forest to our million-gallon outer bay exhibit. Inside the aquarium, families and kids get face-to-face with sea otters, jellies, white sharks, and over 500 other species. Outside the aquarium, we're surrounded by one of the world's most remarkable natural habitats—Monterey Bay—where dolphins, whales, sea otters and a host of other ocean wildlife can be seen every day.

These species represent the apex of the extraordinary marine ecosystem of California's central coast. In 1992, Congress recognized this spectacular assemblage of marine life as a national treasure and established the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary to protect and conserve it. The Monterey Bay Sanctuary helps safeguard the species and habitats that draw millions of people to the central coast to visit, live, and work. All of us who live and work in the region depend on healthy oceans and coasts to keep our businesses and livelihoods thriving. In 2004, California's ocean and coast contributed \$45.7 billion to the state's economy. Ocean-related tourism in particular is a major economic driver on the central coast, where a thriving ocean and protected coastline draws millions of tourists each year.

The Sanctuary is an essential player in this story, helping to protect the “golden goose” that drives the tourism economy of our region.

Our mission at the Monterey Bay Aquarium is to inspire conservation of the oceans. We encounter thousands of people every day and have learned a lot about how they think about the oceans. Our experience has shown that most people are surprised—and somewhat appalled—to learn that less than one percent of U.S. waters are fully protected. Today, the same statistic also applies *within* most national marine sanctuaries. Public opinion research shows that Americans expect special ocean places like sanctuaries to be afforded at least as much protection as special places on land such as Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks.

The National Marine Sanctuary Program is an essential tool for helping close the gap between current reality and the public’s expectation of increased protection for ocean waters. And there’s absolutely no doubt that this increased protection is needed. Ocean ecosystems everywhere are in slow decline due to a host of pressures from our growing human impact. Both the Pew Oceans Commission and National Commission on Ocean Policy recommended that our national marine sanctuaries are an essential part of the solution. But they must do more to realize their potential.

The commissions recommended a fundamental shift in how we manage our oceans, and this needs to drive your thinking in crafting revisions to the Sanctuaries Act. The shift is to move from a goal of managing single species to a goal of maintaining healthy ecosystems. Many federal and state laws now contain provisions recognizing the need to adopt an ecosystem perspective in managing marine wildlife and habitats, including the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation & Management Act, the Endangered Species Act, and California’s Marine Life Management Act.

Healthy ecosystems can help provide the resilience needed to cope with the growing impacts of climate change on our oceans. Toward this end, sanctuary leadership should be empowered to manage and protect the resources under their purview on an ecosystem-scale, including all species and habitats within sanctuary boundaries. The following specific improvements to the National Marine Sanctuaries Act will bring us closer to achieving this vision in our nation’s sanctuaries:

- Raise the stature of the National Marine Sanctuary Program and prioritize its mandate to protect sanctuary resources on an ecosystem-scale.
- Give sanctuary leadership express authority to use science-based tools, such as marine protected areas, to accomplish their mission.
- Expedite the process for improving sanctuary management plans and amending regulations.
- Lift the current moratorium on the designation of new sanctuaries.
- Provide adequate and sustained funding for the sanctuary program.

The reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act is also an opportunity to rethink the structure and process for stakeholder involvement in sanctuary decision-making. Local communities need a voice in sanctuary management through more effective mechanisms than the current advisory councils provide, especially when addressing controversial issues. Sanctuary leadership, including community relations staff, should work to build trust within

the community so that they can effectively engage stakeholders in developing solutions to these issues rather than avoiding them.

In closing, we have the opportunity now to do the right thing on behalf of the natural systems that sustain us all. Humans have protected special natural areas on land for centuries, for the resources they provide or just for their beauty or spiritual value. We need a vision that's about a future with healthy oceans, flourishing wildlife and thriving fishing communities. We can achieve this vision, but we need to start now. The wealth of our oceans is disappearing under our watch. I again want to thank the staff of the National Marine Sanctuary system for their dedication. We look forward to continuing to work together to achieve a positive vision for the future of our oceans.