

**From: Conservation Working Group**

**To: Sanctuary Advisory Council**

**RE: Notification Policy for Transit of Hull Damaged Large Vessels  
Through Sanctuary Waters**

**Date: January 22, 2003**

### **Summary**

The Conservation Working Group (CWG) recommends that the Sanctuary Advisory Council write a letter to the Coast Guard and the Technical Advisory Committee supporting an improved notification process for informing Sanctuary staff when a damaged oil tanker (or other large vessel) is transiting Sanctuary waters. The CWG also encourages the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary to evaluate the risks associated with transit of hull-damaged vessels, and the potential need for additional guidelines on this issue, as part of its oil spill response program.

### **Background**

According to the attached January 11, 2003 article in the *Ventura Star*, on December 21, 2002, the Exxon tanker, the Sea River Long Beach, left the Port of Long Beach for San Francisco to offload its cargo of crude oil before sailing to Port Angeles for repairs. The single hulled tanker had a hole ripped in its hull by its own anchor. A steel patch was welded over the hole as a temporary fix before the ship sailed to San Francisco and on to Port Angeles. The US Coast Guard was notified of the hull damage and approved the ship to continue its journey. The ship arrived in Port Angeles on December 28th or 29th and the repairs were completed and the ship sailed on December 31st for Valdez to load oil.

Staff from the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary and the Washington State Oil Spill Prevention Division did not receive any notification regarding the damaged tanker and were concerned to learn about it after the fact. According to a member of the OCNMS Advisory Council, the Washington State Oil Spill Prevention Division contacted Exxon in Long Beach on December 30 and was told that there was no damage, but only that the transducer for the fathometer (depth sounder) was being replaced. This proved to be inaccurate as a hole in the hull was having a patch welded into place. The company appears to have provided the State with inaccurate and incomplete information.

### **Recommendation**

The CWG is concerned with the risks presented by allowing damaged vessels to transit Sanctuary waters. We believe that permanent repairs should be performed prior to continuing transit and that vessels with damaged hulls should not be allowed in Sanctuary waters. At a minimum, the Coast Guard and the shipping company should notify the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary at the earliest possible opportunity of any damaged ships that will be transiting Sanctuary waters. Such notification will allow the Sanctuary to be as prepared as possible in the event of an accident involving the damaged vessel. The SAC or the MBNMS may also want to evaluate the risks posed by transit of hull-damaged vessels and suggest a protocol for determining whether, and under what circumstances, such transit should be allowed.