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Mr. William Douros
Superintendent
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
299 Foam Street
Monterey, California 93940-1463

Dear Mr. Douros:

As you know I have had an active interest in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary that dates back to its creation. From my perspective as a long-time supporter of the sanctuary, Member of Congress, and lifetime resident of Monterey, I have tried to remain well informed of the activities surrounding the sanctuary and its management. Having witnessed a decade of impressive accomplishments, I am pleased that the sanctuary has committed to building a strong foundation for continued success through a comprehensive review of the management plan. In the spirit of support for the Sanctuary Program, and with the greatest respect for the contributions that you and your staff have made to its numerous successes, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest several areas that should be given special attention during the review process.

The establishment of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary was as significant step for California, the Federal Sanctuary Program, and especially for the coastal communities that came together in support of its creation. I firmly believe that the sanctuary has been a great benefit to the region not only by prohibiting oil exploration and development, but by providing a federally funded mechanism for central coast residents to participate in improving the stewardship of local marine resources. This process has directly resulted in improved water quality, safety, research, monitoring, education, and management. It is no coincidence that the nation's largest marine sanctuary was designated in an area of the country where public interest and active local involvement are such defining characteristics. The sanctuary could not have been established without the broad base of support from local residents and, ten years after its creation, this support continues to be the sanctuary's greatest asset.

The management plan review process that is currently underway represents an extraordinary opportunity for the Sanctuary Program to look back over ten years of success, experimentation, and growth to build on its original mandate and define its role in the future. I feel that this management plan review should place a strong emphasis on strengthening the ties between the sanctuary management and the community of user groups, local governments and agencies that have been involved in the sanctuary since its establishment. The following recommendations suggest several specific ways that this can be achieved.

The Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC)

The Sanctuary Advisory Council is the primary link between the sanctuary and its broad-based constituency. The SAC serves both as a vehicle for local input into sanctuary management, and as a means for the sanctuary to mobilize community support and involvement in management activities. The local community has clearly demonstrated, through years of extraordinary commitment by many devoted individuals, that there is a strong willingness to invest the time and effort into making the SAC an effective mechanism for public input. This management plan review should examine ways of providing the SAC with greater independence and strengthening its role as a trusted partner in sanctuary management.

The advisory role of the SAC, as defined in its charter, creates a necessary separation between the SAC and the Sanctuary Program by giving the sanctuary management final authority to selectively implement SAC recommendations. The charter, however, is inconsistent in maintaining this separation by also providing sanctuary management with oversight over virtually all SAC activity including its membership, communication, and agenda. Because this organizational structure permits hands-on sanctuary involvement in SAC affairs, it has a tendency to diminish public confidence that there is truly a sanctuary-independent mechanism for community input. This, in turn, opens the door to greater mistrust and criticism of final management decisions.

I strongly encourage the sanctuary management to objectively evaluate their ability, under the current protocols, to maintain a relationship with the SAC that affords it the independence essential to its role as an effective liaison between the sanctuary and the community. In making this evaluation I would encourage sanctuary management to engage in a dialogue with both current and past SAC members as well as influential members of the community to obtain insights into how the SAC is perceived and how it can be strengthened to more effectively maintain the confidence of its constituency. "

Collaborative management

Long-term cooperative relationships with user groups, agencies, and local governments have been and will continue to be the sanctuary's most effective tool in addressing resource protection issues. The strength of these relationships is also the key to finding a workable balance between the sanctuary's dual mandates of resource protection and maintaining compatible public use.

It is vitally important that the local Sanctuary Management create the flexibility in their new management plan to work closely with user groups to collaboratively develop common-sense management approaches that meet the goals of the sanctuary's resource protection mandate. The sanctuary should use this flexibility to avoid assuming the role of an uncompromising regulatory entity. The perception that the sanctuary is needlessly adding to the federal bureaucracy or is becoming an unresponsive or redundant permitting agency, creates frustration among groups that would otherwise be willing to make significant voluntary efforts to help the sanctuary further their goals.

It is always difficult to strike a balance between resource protection and human use, but the sanctuary should strive to maintain a functional equilibrium by working with user groups to develop appropriate regulatory measures based on a clear and common understanding of their scientific necessity. If these groups feel that the sanctuary management is unable to exercise the flexibility to find common ground in policies that impose economic or practical burdens on their activities, they will be less inclined to collaborate in resource protection efforts that would be in the long-term interest of the sanctuary.

The role of the Sanctuary in regulating fisheries

In the process of building support for the designation of the sanctuary, a clear commitment was made to the fishing community that the sanctuary would not impose any regulations directed at fishing activities or fishing vessels. This agreement is based on the understanding that the fisheries within the sanctuary are already being regulated and that there is neither the necessity nor the resources for the National Marine Sanctuary Program to take on this responsibility. This management plan review process should not be used as a means toward altering this basic agreement. The regulation of fishing in the sanctuary should remain under the jurisdiction of the California Department Fish and Game and the Pacific Fisheries Management Council. Any future reexamination of this relationship should be conducted directly with representatives of the fishing community and these two agencies.

An important issue, however, that needs clarification during this review, involves the sanctuary's role in collaborating and consulting with other agencies on matters relevant to fisheries management. There remains a considerable range of disagreement about the extent to which sanctuary staff should avoid indirect influence on fisheries regulation. Misunderstandings surrounding this issue have the potential to jeopardize the working relationship that is evolving between the fishing community and the sanctuary. I hope that sanctuary management will consider the resolution of this issue to be of primary importance during the management plan review.

Given the sanctuary's broad mandate to study and protect resources on an ecosystem-wide basis, along with their obligation to share information and coordinate efforts with other agencies, it is unrealistic to think that they can or should work in absolute isolation from these issues. I consider it a very encouraging sign that the local fishing industry, through the formation of the Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries, recognizes this reality and has been collaborating with sanctuary staff and working groups on fishing-related issues.


The sanctuary should work with the Alliance during the management plan review to define a reasonable framework within which they can investigate and provide comments on issues related to fishing. I believe that by establishing standards for openness, opportunities for comment, and a common understanding of the scope and limits of sanctuary expertise, such a framework could serve as a foundation for a much stronger working relationship between the sanctuary and the fishing industry.

Finally, I would like to commend the sanctuary staff for their excellent work in organizing the public scoping meetings that have occurred during first phase of the review. I have received a great deal of positive feedback from these meetings and understand that they were well publicized, well attended, and very productive. In the next phase of the process, as you begin to assimilate public comments, conduct issue workshops, and develop action plans, I encourage you maintain this commitment to public input by working closely with the SAC and facilitating the participation of the users, interest groups, and local governments that make up the core sanctuary constituency.

The sanctuary has a great deal to gain by using this process as a way to build a foundation for improved interaction and collaboration with the community. By making a true commitment to a functional, bottom-up management approach that emphasizes local input and outreach, I feel that the National Marine Sanctuary Program has the potential to play a significant role in shaping the future of federal resource management.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input, and please feel free to contact me or my staff with information and updates on the management plan review.

Sincerely,



SAM FARR
Member of Congress

CC: Dan Basta, Director, National Marine Sanctuary Program