

Marine scientists and professors support NOAA's intent to designate the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary

Dear Mr. William Douros:

We, the undersigned marine and environmental scientists, professors, researchers and academics support the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) proposal to designate the Chumash Heritage site as a National Marine Sanctuary.

The proposed area for the Chumash sanctuary is a stretch of ocean off of California's central coast, awash with some of the sea's wildest life and a deep heritage. It holds incredible biodiversity as well as Chumash sacred sites on and offshore, and is the first example of an Indigenous-led marine sanctuary designation. Sanctuary status offers permanent protections from major threats such as offshore oil and gas drilling and provides funding to better co-manage the area's key ecosystems with the Chumash people.

Ocean creatures find refuge in the Chumash area—a haven for life. The site hosts a range of habitat types from coral reefs and kelp forests to coastal wetlands and dunes. It's a critical feeding stop along the migratory paths of marine mammals. And it's home base for 25 threatened or endangered species, including southern sea otters, leatherback sea turtles and humpback whales.

The Chumash area needs protection from threats such as oil drilling. The recent oil spill off the coast of Orange County, California, is a stark reminder of the destructive impact an oil spill can have on ocean life. We can do better.

Permanently protecting this special place is essential for marine life and its habitat to thrive. Designating the area as a sanctuary will bridge the unprotected gap between two existing sanctuaries along the California coast—the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary to the north and the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary to the south, creating a connected stretch where sea creatures can more safely roam, feed and reproduce, and a longer stretch of coastline where oil drilling is prohibited.

Protected places within our ocean can help them better withstand the impacts of a changing climate and anthropogenic disturbances such as oil drilling. The ocean stores 50 times more carbon dioxide than the atmosphere, and much of that is held in wetlands and seagrass beds, both of which are found

in the Chumash area. If disturbed, these sites can release carbon back into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change.

As ocean lovers, learners, researchers and scientists, we want to give the ocean a chance to fight against intensifying human impacts.

As signers, we support protection of this special place through the designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

Signed,

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