

December 9, 2004

Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, USN (ret.)
Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230



RE: Support for Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council

Dear Admiral Lautenbacher:

I am writing to express my views regarding the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) and specifically, the Sanctuary's Advisory Council (SAC). The Ocean Conservancy has worked on California ocean and coastal protection issues for many years and counts thousands of Monterey Bay area residents in our membership. Our staff currently represents the conservation community on the SAC and co-chairs the MBNMS' Conservation Working Group – a coalition of over a dozen local, state and national marine conservation organizations and agencies with literally millions of members. We attend and actively participate in every SAC meeting and are thus very familiar with the role of the Advisory Council. The MBNMS SAC is a model of citizen involvement in national resource protection: the SAC reflects a wide range of interests; members take their job as advisors seriously and work hard to represent diverse constituencies on the Council.

The MBNMS SAC includes 20 voting members with an impressive range of experience, community involvement, and expertise. It is my understanding that the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments recently submitted recommendations to you regarding how the SAC recruitment process could be improved. Of course there is always room for improvement in outreach and broader advertising of SAC vacancies. I am certain that the MBNMS and the SAC would welcome any assistance or additional resources that could be brought to these efforts. However, I wanted to express my view that the existing SAC process works well, has historically been very successful in recruiting community leaders to represent their constituencies, and is extremely responsive to community interests. For example, a recent request by recreational fishermen resulted in a unanimous SAC vote to recommend to the Superintendent adding a seat specifically to represent that user group.

The Ocean Conservancy does not support changing the appointment process for the At-Large seats on the MBNMS. Given the size and geographic scope of the MBNMS, it is particularly important that the SAC include representatives who are able to speak for the

The Ocean Conservancy strives to be the world's foremost advocate for the oceans. Through science-based advocacy, research, and public education, we inform, inspire and empower people to speak and act for the oceans.

general public, in addition to the many seats devoted to specific stakeholder groups. Given the "unaffiliated" nature of the At-Large SAC seats, they are seen as "above the fray." In recognition of this unique role, At Large SAC members have frequently been selected by their colleagues to serve as SAC Chair. The recommendation that local Boards of Supervisors select the At-Large SAC members is inappropriate and would turn the At-Large SAC seats into political appointments. The Ocean Conservancy strongly urges your ongoing support for the existing SAC selection process, which is open to any and all interested candidates who are selected on their merits, rather than political connections.

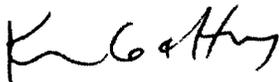
Central Coast residents were the driving force behind the creation of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and local citizens continue to play a critical role in all aspects of the Sanctuary: serving as Sanctuary staff, volunteers, and members of the Advisory Council. Local communities fought for many years to achieve sanctuary protection and over the past decade, the Sanctuary had become one of our area's most beloved institutions. Local citizens remain committed to Sanctuary protection: the MBNMS received over 12,000 public scoping comments during the early stage of the management plan review process initiated in 2001. Over 350 people attended a July 2003 SAC public meeting on the management plan held in Santa Cruz. Clearly the public interest in protecting the Sanctuary is extremely high.

Over the past two years, the MBNMS and its Advisory Council have done a remarkable job hosting an unprecedented participatory process involving hundreds of local stakeholders and covering a wide variety of critical resource protection, education, and research related issues. Significantly, the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments recognized the tremendous success of this process, honoring the Sanctuary's management plan review process with its 2004 Conservation Award.

Ultimately, the MBNMS is a national treasure and the federal government has a responsibility to protect the Sanctuary on behalf of all Americans. However, the Sanctuary's Advisory Council plays an important role in providing valuable local input to the Sanctuary Superintendent. The Ocean Conservancy urges your continued support for the Advisory Council.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



Kaitilin Gaffney
California Central Coast Program Manager

cc: Honorable Sam Farr
Daniel Basta, Director, National Marine Sanctuaries Program
Holly Price, Acting Superintendent, MBNMS