



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
 Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

APR 29 2003

Ms. Stephanie Harlan
 Chair
 Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council
 299 Foam Street
 Monterey, California 93940

Dear Stephanie:

Thank you for your letter of February 11, on behalf of the Sanctuary Advisory Council, regarding the staff of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

One of the most fundamental tenets of the NMSP is that its staff is our most important resource. Success is a function of the expertise and dedication of our staff and community members, such as the Advisory Council, who routinely participate in the activities of the Sanctuary. To that end, we will continue to recruit, hire, train, and retain the best possible staff, through the means that are available to do so.

As I shared with you at the Council Chairs and Coordinators Meeting last month, the National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) shares your concern about conversion of contract staff to federal general schedule positions, but has limited ability to address this problem. Each office of NOAA is given a number of slots for federal employees (called "FTEs" or "full time equivalents") and is required to operate within that number of slots. Our current FTEs are divided among our headquarters and for our thirteen sanctuaries and one Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve field offices. It is unlikely that any additional FTEs will be allocated to the NMSP in the foreseeable future. Therefore, we have and will continue to obtain highly qualified and experienced individuals necessary to achieve our management objectives through whatever mechanisms we have at our disposal, including contracting.

We understand and share the Council's concerns about ensuring benefits are appropriately provided to contract employees. If next fiscal year's resources allow we hope to extend some form of benefits to those contract employees who lack benefits but



should have them. We are also exploring more efficient personnel contracting mechanisms that can provide improved benefits to our contract employees.

We appreciate greatly the concern and support expressed by the Council on behalf of the staff of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary; it is in the best tradition of partnership. Please feel free to discuss any additional staffing concerns you might have with Sanctuary Superintendent Bill Douros.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Basta', written over the typed name.

Daniel J. Basta
Director
National Marine Sanctuary Program