

## California Gets Behind Chumash Marine Sanctuary



**Thumbs up** The Monterey Bay Aquarium was one of thousands of “yes” votes for renewing the nomination of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

When the Northern Chumash Tribal Council nominated the waters of the SLO Coast for designation as the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary in 2015, the nomination went into the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s inventory of sites that qualify for designation.

Because all such nominations are good for five years, in May NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries announced a five-year review of the nomination via the Federal Register, seeking public comment. NOAA was soliciting updated information (scientific and cultural values, any new or increased threats to marine habitat and wildlife, etc.) to help them in weighing the decision to either renew the nomination or let it expire.

The public comment period ended on June 15, with comments from more than a thousand people and organizations, including the Sierra Club, sent to the Federal Register website, the overwhelming majority in support of the nomination.

The comment from Wade Crowfoot, California's Secretary for Natural Resources, the state agency charged with restoring, protecting and managing the state's natural, historical and cultural resources, merits reprinting in full:

May 26, 2020  
Mr. William J. Douros  
Regional Director  
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration

Dear Mr. Douros,

During these unprecedented times, the California Natural Resources Agency remains committed to protecting the state's ocean and marine environment, economy, and historical and cultural artifacts. With this letter, I submit for the record my enthusiastic support to renew the nomination for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (CHNMS).

With changing ocean conditions associated with the threats of climate change, National Marine Sanctuaries are critically important management tools to preserve California's incredible marine biodiversity as well as safeguard the local economies that depend on a healthy ocean ecosystem. The proposed CHNMS would also importantly advance the state and federal governments' increasing collaboration with Native American tribes in natural resource protection.

In the past year, it has been my distinct honor to appoint Tribal Representatives to the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Statewide Leadership Team, of which the West Coast Regional Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) is also appointed. The proposed CHNMS would not only would protect submerged Chumash Tribal Sacred Sites (a consideration for National Significance Criteria 2), but would also provide partnership opportunities between ONMS, Tribal Representatives, and the rest of the MPA Statewide Leadership Team to continue to consider tribal interests in marine protected area management (aligned with Management Consideration 6).

Like my predecessor, former Secretary John Laird, I too value and prioritize designations of protected areas to ensure that California's unique ocean ecosystems are shielded from oil and gas exploration and production. The proposed CHNMS would cover the area from Gaviota, where the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary begins, to Cambria, where the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary ends. This would not only provide important ecological connectivity to the existing National Marine Sanctuaries but would also protect ecosystems from oil and gas exploration that have already experienced significant oil spills in 1969 and 2015. Protecting this area from adverse impacts from future oil spills as well as future sea bed mining directly aligns with Management Consideration 3, and nearly all of the 11 sanctuary nomination process criteria. For this reason, in addition to the many other benefits to tourism, research, and natural and cultural resource protection, I encourage ONMS to renew the nomination for the CHNMS.

Sincerely,  
Wade Crowfoot  
Secretary for Natural Resources

Also weighing in with full-throated support:

Environmental Defense Center  
League of Women Voters  
California League of Conservation Voters  
Surfrider Foundation  
WILDCOAST  
Santa Barbara Channelkeeper  
CFROG - Climate First: Replacing Oil & Gas  
Save Our Shores  
Los Angeles Waterkeeper  
Sierra Club Los Padres Chapter  
Ocean Conservation Research  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Gaviota Coast Conservancy  
Santa Barbara Audubon Society  
Heal the Ocean  
Oceana  
Heal the Bay  
California Marine Sanctuary Foundation  
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin  
Citizens Planning Association  
Get Oil Out! (GOO!)  
Cultural and Creative Arts Center of Santa Maria Valley  
Natural Resources Defense Council

NOAA, we hope you got the message.