

## Earth Day and Our Sanctuaries

*By Kris Sarri, President & CEO, National Marine Sanctuary Foundation*

On January 28, 1969, a blowout on an oil drilling platform six miles off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, spilled an estimated 3 million gallons of crude oil into the ocean. The massive spill shut down commercial fishing, fouled beaches, and killed a great number of dolphins, sea lions, seals, and more than 3,600 seabirds. At the time, the disaster was the largest oil spill in U.S. history. Americans witnessed the oil-coated animals' suffering on live television and reacted with a new intensity of environmental concern and activism. The event, horrific as it was, marked a [turning point](#) in the nation's conservation history. The activism ignited by the spill helped spur the first Earth Day fifty years ago, celebrated by 20 million Americans across the country. It also built bipartisan support for landmark laws to protect our ocean, including the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act passed in 1972.

Today, near the site of the Santa Barbara Oil Spill, is The Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, where massive forests of kelp shelter a diversity of marine life. Private entities, local communities, the State of California, and the Chumash Tribe are working in partnership with the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to manage this protected area. Their work is local; its impacts are global.

Safeguarding biodiversity and building a sustainable global economy that protects our blue planet is critical to people's health and well-being. This year, the first virtual online [Capitol Hill Ocean Week](#) (CHOW), convening on June 9, will focus on protecting the amazing biodiversity of our ocean. Throughout the world, we are losing species diversity, with harmful consequences for humans, economies, and the environment. But there are solutions if we work together as stewards of these places. Scientists, managers, and governments are calling for countries to work together to protect nature and to reduce the loss of diversity, slow climate change, and increase our ability to adapt to it.

The Capitol Hill Ocean Week Conference is the nation's premier annual conference examining current marine and coastal policy issues. [Don't miss your chance](#) to participate in this event, which is free and open to the public, allowing ocean champions of all ages, professions, and backgrounds to add their voices to the critical discussions that take place.