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Sanctuary Advisory Council
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
99 Pacific Street, Building 455
Monterey, CA 93940
(831) 647-4201

October 23, 2015

Jim Landon
Chief, Office of Law Enforcement, NOAA
8484 Georgia Avenue, Suite 415
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Chief Landon:

On behalf of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) Advisory Council, we respectfully request that your office expedite the recruitment to backfill the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) position in Monterey, California.

The previous NOAA OLE officer officially retired from this position in July 2015 with distinguished service, having served for over 12 years as the sole officer on duty to patrol and respond to law enforcement issues for the 6,000 square-mile marine sanctuary. In addition, the NOAA OLE special agent stationed in Monterey is no longer in active service. Therefore, the nearest OLE enforcement agent is 3 hours drive from the sanctuary and cannot divert from an already taxing workload to conduct patrols and monitoring activities beyond his normal duties.

Since July, the Sanctuary's law enforcement partners, namely the State and US Coast Guard, have been working to provide coverage for living marine resource issues within MBNMS. They too are facing the challenges of unfilled positions and capacity issues in meeting their own mandates. When serious events arise and partner agencies are available, we understand they are responding quickly, and we are grateful for that assistance. Yet, even with partner assistance, the Sanctuary has daily law enforcement needs that are not being met, and many members of the public are noting the lack of presence and response by a NOAA uniformed officer.

Some examples of daily enforcement needs not currently being met include wildlife harassment issues for large whales, pinnipeds and sea otters. This year has been an unprecedented year for large whale species coming inshore to feed on small fish. This proximity to the coast has encouraged kayakers, paddle boarders, boaters and swimmers to get very close to animals, thereby causing increased numbers of chronic marine mammal harassment issues being reported by the public and our volunteers.

In the southern region of the sanctuary, the northern elephant seal population is increasing, and expanding its range to additional beaches, with occasional haul outs adjacent to California Highway One. As you can imagine, this causes a number of interactions between humans and seals, which are not beneficial to the seals and which may be dangerous for humans. In addition to wildlife disturbance issues, other critical enforcement events include vessel sinkings/groundings, low flying aircraft, sewage/fuel spills and discharges, jet ski zone violations, and cruise ship inspections.

Please ensure that the LEO backfill position continues to have a strong focus on National Marine Sanctuary Act and MBNMS regulations. During this interim period with the position vacant, it would be helpful to have a local responsive capability for enforcement issues that are more critical in nature.

We understand the recruitment for several LEO positions is in process, yet the process may take a number of months to complete. We request that you give priority to the Monterey LEO recruitment to fill the position with a seasoned candidate as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Margaret (PJ) Webb". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Margaret (PJ) Webb
Sanctuary Advisory Council Chair