

MBNMS Conservation Working Group Statement

December 11, 2012

CWG Co-Chairs: Geoff Shester and Lauren Dockendorf

CWG Members:

Sarah Damron (Surfrider Foundation)
Lauren Dockendorf (Save Our Shores) [Co-chair]
Carol Maehr (American Cetacean Society)
Patricia Matejcek (Sierra Club, Ventana Chapter)
Harriet Mitteldorf (At-Large)
Nick Naccari (Native Animal Rescue)
Geoff Shester (Oceana) [Co-chair]
Steve Shimek (Monterey Coastkeeper)
Deborah Streeter (Upwellings Ministry)
Anna Weinstein (Audubon California)
Mary Whitney (Fluke Foundation)

The Conservation Working Group met on Thursday, November 29 at the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve. In addition to CWG members, the meeting was attended by Gary Pezzi (SAC Member), Bonnie Van Hise (Congressman Farr's office), and MBNMS staff Karen Grimmer.

The CWG is encouraged by the SAC's discussion of the role of its working groups and conveys its willingness and desire to develop a stronger, more integrated working relationship with the SAC.

The CWG received a presentation by Dr. Scott Benson (NMFS) entitled "The origin of California's leatherback sea turtles and potential trans-Pacific partnerships". Dr. Benson provided a very informative overview about the population status of critically endangered Pacific leatherbacks, and outlined the declining numbers at a staggering 6% per year. The presentation highlighted that the main nesting beaches for turtles that forage in MBNMS waters are located in a remote part of Papua, Indonesia, where there are ongoing threats from human activities. The CWG established a sub-committee to explore potential avenues for developing partnerships between Monterey Bay and Indonesian communities. The CWG wishes to present these options to the SAC at a future meeting. In the meantime, the CWG recommends the SAC invite Dr. Benson to give a similar presentation to the full SAC at an upcoming meeting.

The CWG discussed the issue of forage species, including the possible action items before the SAC. Regarding the letter, the CWG supports the letter as drafted by Superintendent Paul Michel. The CWG's position is that a letter should summarize the SAC's process and deliberations on forage species, support state and federal policies to protect unfished forage species from future harvest, and encourage implementation of those policies, without passing judgment on existing management. The CWG spent significant time discussing the resolution, and considering feedback received thus far on its language. As a result, the CWG crafted a revised resolution with the intent of

simplifying and being responsive. The CWG strongly supports the adoption of the revised resolution, and notes that resolutions are the primary means for the SAC to establish formal positions on specific topics at the conclusion of SAC deliberations. The CWG further notes that the revised resolution supports and encourages implementation of recently established state and federal policies that received widespread support from the fishing and conservation communities. The CWG also wishes to thank the SAC for their deliberate consideration of this issue over the past year.

The CWG also received an update from MBNMS Staff Karen Grimmer on Sanctuary Ecologically Significant Areas, in which Ms. Grimmer requested feedback from the CWG. The CWG is highly supportive of the deliberate, science-based effort to identify SESAs, as this effort will greatly improve the capacity of the Sanctuary to achieve its resource protection goals, and better engage in multiple relevant policy processes. The CWG understands that the currently proposed SESAs are benthically-focused and that areas within state waters were excluded from the analysis, under the rationale that the initial effort is focused on the federal Pacific Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat 5-year review. The CWG recommends the Sanctuary explicitly clarify that this does not preclude a more comprehensive evaluation of SESAs, in particular, pelagic-focused SESAs and SESAs in state waters. The CWG urges the Sanctuary to exercise caution to avoid implying that areas not identified as SESAs are appropriate for bottom-contact activities.