

June 14, 2021

Honorable Joe Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington D.C. 20500

RE: Strongly protecting 30% of America's oceans by 2030

Dear President Biden,

In context of your visionary Jan. 27, 2021 "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad," and its "30x30" initiative (Sec. 216), we the undersigned scientists urge you to significantly expand federal efforts to strongly protect and restore America's oceans. We note your encouraging willingness to "go big" with major policy initiatives, and we respectfully ask that you also do so with ocean protection.

America's oceans support a multibillion-dollar economy, millions of jobs, and resources and services enjoyed by all Americans. However, our ocean ecosystems are in significant decline due to overexploitation, climate change, acidification, and pollution. Many marine species are threatened or endangered, and entire marine ecosystems (e.g., Arctic sea ice ecosystem, coral reef ecosystems, etc.), are severely threatened. All of our ocean ecosystems will have difficulty retaining functional integrity throughout the climate crisis this century, and these ecosystems need the strongest protections we can provide.

As concluded in Environment America's 2021 "New Life for the Oceans" report (<https://environmentamerica.org/feature/ame/new-life-ocean>), the science on this is perfectly clear -- fully protected Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) protect and enhance biodiversity; increase ecosystem health; increase biomass, abundance, and diversity of marine species; and mitigate impacts of climate change. Science has done its job identifying anthropogenic risks and impacts to our oceans. Now policymakers must apply that science in restoring and protecting these vital national assets for our common future.

Your administration offers perhaps our last best hope to effectively reverse ocean ecosystem decline, and begin to restore these national treasures. This is clearly in our national interest. As an example, the strongly protected Marine National Monuments established by President George W. Bush and expanded by President Obama in the central and western Pacific, provide a model of large-scale, federal ocean protection measures that must be replicated in other regions of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone.

The Marine Conservation Institute's 2021 "Sea States" report (<https://marine-conservation.org/us-seastates-2021/>), concludes that, although roughly 23.8% of U.S. waters are considered strongly protected, virtually all of that is in the remote central and western Pacific. The report concludes that only 1% of continental state waters, and 0.01% of continental federal waters are strongly protected. To reach your laudable 30% goal, we need significantly more continental shelf waters in strongly protected status.

Accordingly, we ask your administration to identify all threats to our nation's marine ecosystems, and to establish robust and durable management measures to mitigate such threats and to sustain our ocean ecosystems. In addition to improving sustainable management of ocean ecosystems in general, we ask you to evaluate and establish strongly protected Marine National Monuments (via executive authority under the Antiquities Act), to protect critical large-scale, federal offshore ecosystems. Marine National Monuments are the most direct, durable, and strongest policy instrument available to you to achieve the 30% goal for the oceans, and they should legally withstand any effort by a future federal administration to weaken them.

At a minimum, these marine monuments should prohibit extractive activities (oil, gas, seabed mining), harmful fishing practices (bottom trawling, etc.), and reduce marine pollution (plastic debris, oil, hazardous chemicals, undersea noise, etc.); and they should support and enhance low-impact, sustainable recreation, tourism, subsistence and scientific research. Importantly, these marine monuments must protect and restore populations of marine mammals, seabirds, fish, and all pelagic and seabed ecological functions.

In this regard, we urge your administration to prioritize highly threatened, productive continental shelf waters for protection as Marine National Monuments, including in the Arctic Ocean, Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands, Gulf of Alaska, Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of Maine, the Caribbean, and Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Each marine monument should appoint a stakeholder advisory committee, a scientific advisory committee, and should develop a management plan to advance the overall goal of long-term ecosystem restoration and protection.

Mr. President, we must not miss this opportunity to restore and protect our precious ocean ecosystems. Your executive action here as requested will ensure that America's oceans have the best chance possible to endure the climate crisis this century.

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We look forward to working with your administration toward this important national goal.

Respectfully (affiliations for identification purposes only),

Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, Founder of the Jane Goodall Institute
& U. N. Messenger of Peace

Prof. Richard Steiner, University of Alaska (ret.), Marine Conservation Biologist,
Anchorage AK

Dr. Ingrid Burke, Dean and Professor, Yale University School of Environment, New
Haven CT

Dr. Valerie Forbes, Professor and Dean, College of Biological Sciences, University of
Minnesota, Minneapolis MN

Dr. Lisa Levin, Distinguished Professor of Biological Oceanography and Marine
Ecology, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California San Diego,
La Jolla CA

Prof. A. Alonso Aguirre, Professor and Department Chair, Department of
Environmental Science and Policy, George Mason University, Fairfax VA

Char Miller, WM Keck Professor of Environmental Analysis and History, Pomona
College, Claremont CA

Jean Moran, Professor, Earth and Environmental Sciences, California State
University East Bay, Hayward CA

Dr. Kevin Arrigo, PhD, Professor, Stanford University, Stanford CA

Prof. Peder Anker, Professor, New York University, New York NY

Dr. Jenifer E. Telesca, Assistant Professor of Environmental Justice, Pratt Institute,
Brooklyn NY

Prof. Sandra Carlson, PhD, Professor, University of California Davis, Davis CA

Dr. Kathy Kuletz, Wildlife Biologist, Seabird Section Lead for Alaska, U.S. Fish and
Wildlife Service, Anchorage AK

Michael Stocker, Marine Bioacoustician, Ocean Conservation Research,
Lagunitas, CA

Prof. Oran Young, Professor Emeritus, Bren School of Environmental Science and
Management, University of California Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara CA

Dr. Daniel Spencer, PhD, Environmental Studies, University of Montana,
Missoula MT

Craig Crossley, Student Advisor, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley CA

Dr. Shirley Baker, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

Ceal Smith, MSci Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Research and Policy Director,
Alaska Institute for Climate and Energy, Homer AK

Michael Fenster, PE, retired, Anchorage AK

Dr. Katie Mathews, Chief Scientist, Oceana, Washington DC

Craig Matkin, Marine Biologist, North Gulf Oceanic Society, Homer AK

Erwan Monier, Associate Professor of Climate Change Impacts, University of
California Davis, Davis CA

Dr. Kristen Carden, PhD/J.D., Senior Scientist, Oceans Program, Center for Biological
Diversity, Bozeman MT

Gustav Paulay, Professor, University of Florida, Gainesville FL

Dr. Pauline Yu, Member of Faculty, The Evergreen State College, Olympia WA

Dr. Reese Halter, PhD, Ecostress Physiology, Arcata CA

Dr. Lisa Rotterman, PhD, Homer AK

Dr. Jose Garcia-Arraras, Professor, University of Puerto Rico, San Juan PR

Mark Rauzon, Professor, Laney College, Oakland CA

Dr. Martin Raphael, PhD, Raphael Ecological Consulting, Olympia WA

David Johns, J.D., McMinnville OR

Prof. Nina Kamovsky, PhD, Professor of Biology, Pomona College, Claremont CA

Gail Osherenko, J.D., Retired Lecturer, Senior Researcher in Ocean and Coastal Law and Policy, University of California Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara CA

Ms. Nandita Parker, Board of Directors, Marine Conservation Institute, New Orleans LA

Kim Nelson, Research Wildlife Biologist, Oregon State University, Corvallis OR

Prof. David Anderson, PhD, Wake Forest University, Winston Salem NC

Dr. Daniel W. Anderson, Professor and Research Biologist, University of California Davis, Davis CA

Erica Cirino, Outreach and Media Coordinator, The Safina Center, Setauket NY

Dr. K David Hyrenbach, Professor of Oceanography, Hawaii Pacific University, Waimanalo HI

Dr. Darcy Hu, PhD, National Park Service (ret.), Kailua HI

Annika Anderson, Waterbird Biologist, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, South Beach OR

Dr. Kenneth Briggs, PhD, DVM, Companion Animal Hospital, Santa Cruz CA

Martin Reedy, RN, Topanga CA

Dr. Jason Jannot, Research Fishery Biologist, Seattle WA

Dr. Jacob Anderson, PhD, Assistant Research Professor, Boise State University, Boise ID

Dr. Geoffrey Shester, PhD, Senior Scientist, Oceana, Monterey CA

Benjamin Enticknap, Senior Scientist, Oceana, Portland OR

Dr. Mark Hixon, PhD, Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology, University of Hawaii, Honolulu HI

Alyssa Stansfield, PhD Student, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook NY

Dr. Cindy Lee, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook NY

Alyson Lowell, PhD Candidate, Stony Brook University, Southampton NY

Tonian Keiling, M.S., Oceanography Technician, Stony Brook University,
Massapequa Park NY

Dr. Karine Kleinhaus, Associate Professor, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook NY

Emmanuelle Pales Espinosa, PhD, Research Associate Professor, Stony Brook
University, Stony Brook NY

Sonia Sharan, M.A., Policy Analyst, Impact and Economics, Oceana, Washington DC

Prof. Donald Drake, PhD, University of Hawaii, Honolulu HI

Dr. Brian Bowen, Research Professor, University of Hawaii, Honolulu HI

Prof. Brian Popp, PhD, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu HI

Robert Toonen, Professor, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Kaneohe HI

Dr. Edward E. DeMartini, PhD, Adjunct Professor, Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology,
University of Hawaii, Kaneohe HI

Dr. Sterling Keeley, PhD, Professor of Botany Emerita, University of Hawaii at Manoa,
Honolulu HI

Dr. Masato Yoshizawa, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Hawaii at Manoa,
Honolulu HI

Dr. Jeffrey Spendelow, PhD, Emeritus Research Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Geological
Survey, Silver Spring MD

Mariah Pfleger, Marine Scientist, Oceana, Washington DC

Dr. Christopher Pitt Wolfe, Associate Professor, School of Marine and Atmospheric
Sciences, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook NY

Frances Withrow, Marine Scientist, Washington DC

Dr. Kurt Bretsch, Lecturer, Stony Brook University, Southampton NY

Dr. Roxanne Karimi, PhD, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook NY

Dr. Victor Van Ballenberghe, PhD, U.S. Forest Service, ret., Anchorage AK

Mr. Sonny Leomiti, MA Ed., Vice President, Administration and Finance, American
Samoa Community College, PagoPago AS

Prof. Colleen Cavanaugh, PhD, Harvard University, Cambridge MA

Robert Cowie, Research Professor, University of Hawaii, Honolulu HI

Dr. Rosa Meehan, MSc., PhD, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (ret.), Engaged
Community Participant and Activist, Anchorage AK

Dr. Joseph Cook, PhD Regents Professor of Biology, University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque NM

Dr. Brian Tissot, Professor and Director, Marine Lab, Humboldt State University,
Trinidad CA

Dr. Jake Ferguson, PhD, University of Hawaii, Honolulu HI

Dr. Jennifer Ruesink, PhD, Professor of Biology, University of Washington,
Seattle WA

Octavio Aburto-Oropeza, Associate Professor, Scripps Institution of Oceanography,
University of California San Diego, La Jolla CA

Dr. Richard Norris, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California San
Diego, La Jolla CA

Dr. Michael Latz, Research Biologist Emeritus, Scripps Institution of Oceanography,
University of California San Diego, La Jolla CA

Dr. Daniel Palacios, PhD, Oregon State University, Newport OR

Ms. Lesley Handa, Ornithologist, Handa Ornithology Lab, San Diego CA

Dr. Judith Weis, PhD, Professor Emerita, Rutgers University, Newark NJ

Dr. James Rising, Assistant Professor, University of Delaware, Newark DE

Prof. Deborah Lawrence, Professor of Environmental Sciences and Director,
Environmental Thought and Practice, University of Virginia, Charlottesville VA

Prof. Charles Simenstad, Research Professor Emeritus, University of Washington,
Seattle WA

Budd Titlow, MS, Wildlife Ecology/Professional Wetland Scientist,
Author/Photographer, San Diego CA

Megan Flaherty, MS Ecology, San Diego Audubon Society, San Diego CA

Edward Orlando, Associate Professor, Howard Community College, Columbia MD

Prof. David Scheel, Professor of Marine Biology, Anchorage AK