

Dear Members of Congress:

The National Marine Sanctuary System is our essential network of protected waters held in trust for all Americans. Marine sanctuaries and monuments conserve some of the Nation's most critical natural, historic, and cultural resources and promote access for exploration and world-class outdoor recreation. Sanctuaries and marine protected areas are vital to maintaining a healthy ocean and Great Lakes, addressing climate change, and sustaining productive coastal economies. Sanctuaries generate \$8 billion annually in local economies and support numerous jobs and businesses in the fishing, tourism, recreation, and scientific research sectors.

For FY 2023, we strongly urge Congress to:

- Provide at least \$87 million for Sanctuaries and Marine Protected Areas, within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Operations, Research, and Facilities (ORF) account; and,
- Provide at least \$8.5 million for Marine Sanctuaries Construction, within NOAA's Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction (PAC) account.
- Direct NOAA to prioritize conservation, education, mapping, and research efforts across the agency in the National Marine Sanctuary System.
- Cap NOAA and the National Ocean Service corporate fees to no more than 5 percent of the annual appropriations.
- Strike section 304(f) of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

The ocean is central to mitigating climate change; it has absorbed 90 percent of the climate system's excess heat. Climate change is disproportionately impacting the ocean, causing changes in water temperature, ocean acidification, and deoxygenation, which changes ocean circulation and chemistry, raises sea levels, increases storm intensity, and changes the diversity and abundance of marine species. These impacts threaten the physical well-being, economic prosperity, and food security of communities along our coasts and businesses that rely on marine resources and transportation. National marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments are a key part of the solution to ocean climate impacts. They protect coastal and marine ecosystems that remove atmospheric carbon and store it in marine sediments and habitats, safeguard coastal communities from flooding and storms and reduce non-climate stressors to support ecosystem resilience.

Communities across the Nation can nominate their most treasured places in marine and Great Lakes waters for consideration as national marine sanctuaries. Engaging communities as stewards of these protected waters make sanctuaries unique and provides a comprehensive, highly participatory approach to managing and conserving marine ecosystems and the Great Lakes for current and future generations. Recent sanctuary designations, nominations, and expansions are the result of passionate citizens and widespread community interest in conserving our ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes.

For sanctuary Operations, Research and Facilities (ORF) funding, we urge Congress to provide at least \$87 million. ONMS manages more ocean and Great Lakes area than the entire National Park Service on a significantly lower budget. This is the minimum level of funding necessary to meet the goal of advancing conservation and restoration in U.S. waters while addressing the threats of disappearance of nature, climate change, and inequitable access to the outdoors.

The requested increase is an investment in the growing number of communities seeking to expand sanctuaries or nominate and designate new ones and to increase funds for science, management and public outreach at existing sanctuaries and monuments. There are three sites currently in the designation process as national marine sanctuaries, four sites on the nomination inventory awaiting action, and one site under consideration for the inventory. These sites have strong community-based

support and four were nominated by Indigenous communities. Funding would support the designation process for sanctuaries in the ONMS Inventory and complete the proposed Papahānaumokuākea, Lake Ontario and Chumash Heritage sanctuaries' designation.

For sanctuary Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction (PAC) funding, we propose at least \$8.5 million. This funding will support replacement or repair of vessels that are critical to ONMS's mission. ONMS maintains a fleet of small boats that allow managers and partners to assess, monitor, research, and protect marine sanctuaries. These efforts include responding to entangled whales, conducting scientific missions, maintaining mooring buoys, testing new technologies and tools, and enforcing regulations. To continue on-the-water science and conservation programs that strengthen the management of our ocean and Great Lakes, investment in recapitalizing aging vessels across the National Marine Sanctuary System in addition to upgrades, retrofits, and life-cycle extensions is critical. Funding would also support improvements for visitor centers, facilities and signage, and ADA compliance that anchor tourism and recreation in communities and enhance equitable access to nature.

This year the Nation will mark the 50th anniversary of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. As the Nation moves towards this anniversary, we need to invest in America's protected waters and the communities that depend upon them. We appreciate Congress recognizing the importance of sanctuaries and monuments by including report language in Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2022 to prioritize marine debris cleanup efforts within marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments. We urge Congress to expand language prioritizing conservation, education, mapping, and research efforts in the National Marine Sanctuary System to include other accounts within NOAA.

For NOAA's National Ocean Service, we urge Congress to provide at least \$15 million within the Navigation, Observation, and Positioning account to enhance observations, data management and co-developed data products for national marine sanctuaries; \$5 million within the Office of Response and Restoration for marine debris removal in sanctuaries and monuments to enhance water quality and reduce the impacts of debris on resources; \$1 million within the Coral Reef Conservation Program to support the MPA Center providing technical assistance to Pacific Islands, Caribbean, and international partners, complementing USAID investments; \$10 million within National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science for biogeographic assessments and characterizations in sanctuaries and monuments to evaluate regulatory and management decisions, and grants to non-federal partners for targeted research on priority management issues; \$5 million within the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) program to support the collection, management, accessibility and distribution of critical natural and archaeological data and information in coordination with IOOS Regional Associations.

For NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service we urge Congress to provide at least \$100 million for Habitat Conservation and Restoration and dedicate \$40 million to support habitat restoration in U.S. waters, with the majority of the increase directed for restoration specifically in national marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments and assessing blue carbon sequestration; \$5 million for the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment Program to support the expansion of the program and capability to directly engage with and support the science needs and management of sanctuaries and monuments; an increase of \$10 million for Protected Resources Science and Management to support species recovery grants and marine mammals, turtles, and other species projects in national marine sanctuaries; and Funding for the Office of Law Enforcement to increase enforcement in sanctuaries.

For NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), we urge Congress to provide \$5 million within OAR's climate research to support climate science in sanctuaries and monuments; \$6

million within OAR's Office of Exploration and Research to support and conduct critical operations in the National Marine Sanctuary System, with emphasis on the Pacific Islands Region, Great Lakes, and Gulf of Mexico; \$3 million within OAR's Ocean Acidification Program to focus research on sanctuaries and monuments aligned with the current Strategic Plan; and \$3 million for NOAA Research Laboratories (GLERL, PMEL, AOML), to support the design, construction, and installation of research and monitoring instrumentation in National Marine Sanctuaries and Monuments.

For NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations, we urge Congress to provide \$3 million in dedicated funds to support operations in the National Marine Sanctuary System using NOAA Ships and uncrewed systems to address science and management needs and provide increased access to and on water presence for NOAA and partners in these protected areas.

We strongly urge you to invest in America's community-based national marine sanctuaries by supporting the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries at no less than \$95.5 million in FY 2023. Robust funding will ensure sound management of these treasured places through community stewardship; support of mission critical tools, like small boats; active restoration of marine environments; preservation of maritime resources; and improved understanding of marine and Great Lakes ecosystems. Your support for sanctuaries and monuments sends a powerful message about the benefits of a healthy ocean and Great Lakes, and underscores the continuing ecological and historical value of America's underwater national treasures. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Kristen J. Sarri, President and CEO

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation