CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources, Council Chair
Matt Rodriquez, Secretary for Environmental Protection
Gavin Newsom, Lieutenant Governor, State Lands Commission Chair
Robert Hertzberg, State Senator
Mark Stone, State Assemblymember
Michael Brown, Public Member

February 7, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke, Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Subject: Notice of Availability of the 2019–2024 Draft Proposed Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program and Notice of Intent to Prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Docket ID: BOEM–2017–0074)

Dear Secretary Zinke:

I write on behalf of the California Ocean Protection Council to express our strong, unanimous opposition to new or expanded leases for oil and gas development on the California Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), as proposed in the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's 2019-2024 *Draft Proposed Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program* (DPP). We urge you to withdraw the California OCS from the 2019-2024 proposed leasing program. Offshore oil and gas lease sales would imperil California's iconic coastal and marine environment and our vibrant, productive ocean economy. The OPC was created in California statute to, among other things, provide state leadership on ocean and coastal policy matters including identifying changes in federal law and policy necessary to improve protection, conservation, and restoration of ocean ecosystems in federal and state waters off the California coast.

California has remained steadfast in its opposition to offshore oil and gas development for decades. There have been no new federal or state offshore oil and gas leases in California since the 1969 blowout of a well in the Santa Barbara Channel, which spewed an estimated three million gallons of crude oil into the Pacific Ocean, creating a 35-mile long oil slick along California's coast, killing thousands of birds, fish and sea mammals, fouling miles of California's shoreline and beaches, and devastating tourism and commercial fishing. Yet despite the prohibition on new leases, California has suffered from major oil spills along the coast, including the 2015 Refugio spill which released approximately 140,000 gallons of heavy crude oil along the Gaviota coast in Santa Barbara.

Particularly vulnerable are the 124 state Marine Protected Areas, the four National Marine Sanctuaries (Cordell Bank, Greater Farallones, Monterey Bay and Channel Islands), and four National Parks with marine waters (Redwood, Point Reyes, Channel Islands, and Golden Gate) all of which significantly contribute to the State's vibrant and productive ocean and coastal economy while bolstering the sustainability of ocean ecosystems. In addition, our coastal communities and fisheries are at an unprecedented risk from changing ocean conditions and other factors; sanctuaries are critical to ensuring the long-term health of our ocean ecosystems and protecting the coastal livelihoods and economies that rely on them. Any effort to undo decades of marine protection is simply misguided.

In conjunction with the DPP, the ongoing Department of Commerce review of National Marine Sanctuary boundaries is alarming because of the implications for opening up National Marine Sanctuaries to offshore oil and gas drilling. It is worth noting that the National Marine Sanctuary Program was created by President Nixon in the wake of the Santa Barbara oil spill to protect important and unique areas of America's oceans. Currently, there are 13 National Marine Sanctuaries within the United States and no president has ever reduced or eliminated any of these remarkable areas. Marine sanctuaries are critical to the economy, beauty, and security of our country. They can help restore marine populations and provide refuge for populations at risk due to industrial activities including oil and gas drilling.

In your decision to remove Florida's coast from the DPP, you identified the contribution that coastal tourism makes to that state's economy and the unique threats that oil and gas drilling activities pose to the tourism sector. Coastal tourism and recreation comprise forty-two percent of California's $44.2 billion coastal and ocean economy. In addition, California is home to dozens of commercial fisheries that hauled in some 167 million pounds of catch worth more than $200 million in 2016. Both of these economic sectors are dependent upon healthy marine and coastal ecosystems. We also take issue with the fact that the DPP ranks the environmental sensitivity of the California Current as the least sensitive among all the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management ecoregions. Scientific research and studies have indicated that the California Current is one of the richest marine areas in the world and the primary reason that California are fisheries are so productive.

California's opposition to offshore oil and gas development is neither partisan nor geographic; it is deeply ingrained across the state. Over the last 35 years, California leaders, both legislative and executive, have expressed consistent, united opposition to any new oil and gas activities. We are approaching the 25th anniversary of the California Coastal Sanctuary Act, which prohibits oil and gas drilling off the coast in state waters. The Legislature has repeatedly in the ensuing decades passed resolutions in opposition to new offshore oil and gas development with bipartisan support. The Sanctuary Act contains findings by the Legislature that offshore oil and gas production in certain areas of the State's waters posed an unacceptably high risk of damage and disruption to the environment. Republican and Democratic Governors alike have officially expressed their opposition to oil and gas development offshore. In 2006, 2008, and 2014, the governors of California, Oregon, and Washington sent letters to the President of the United States and to Congress supporting moratoria on offshore oil and gas leasing and opposing any efforts to renew and expand oil and gas leasing off the entire West Coast. Most recently, on January 4, 2018, Governor Brown issued a joint statement with the governors of Washington and Oregon expressing opposition to renewed oil and gas leasing in the Pacific region.

Furthermore, at least 18 California coastal cities and nine of California's 15 coastal counties — Santa Cruz, San Mateo, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, San Francisco, Sonoma, San Diego, Humboldt and Mendocino — have local laws that require a vote of the people before allowing construction of terminals, pipelines, and other oil equipment. A public opinion poll conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California in July 2017, indicated that support of offshore oil and gas was at an all-time low - just 25 percent of Californians were in favor, while 69 percent were opposed. Californians have taken responsibility for ocean and coastal protection for decades and this is exemplified in their active opposition to offshore oil and gas development in the wake of the Santa Barbara oil spill and the passage of the California Coastal Act in 1976. Nearly 70 percent of Californians live in coastal counties, consequently it is beyond comprehension that the Department of Interior has not scheduled a single meeting in coastal community in California.

As a result of the State's unanimous and unyielding opposition to offshore oil and gas development, which has resulted in Congressional moratoria and Presidential action, the Pacific OCS has not been included in any approved Five-Year Program since the 1987-1992 Program. Consequently, the proposed 2019-2024 Five-Year Plan is the first time in over 30 years that the Department of Interior and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) are proposing oil and gas lease sales in all three California OCS planning areas. Specifically, the DPP proposes two lease sales in the Southern California Planning Area in 2020 and 2022, two sales in the Northern California Planning Area in 2021 and 2023, and two sales in the Central California Planning Area in 2021 and 2023.

The risk to California's environment and its $2.6 trillion economy posed by these proposed lease sales is catastrophic, particularly in light of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's current proposal to revise its Production Safety Systems Rule. We are very concerned about any revision to this rule. It provides critical protections regarding safety and pollution prevention equipment, subsea safety devices and safety device testing for the production of oil and gas resources on the OCS.

California is working aggressively towards having one of the most ambitious and diversified energy portfolios in the world, including an electricity grid powered by solar, wind, geothermal and biomass renewable resources, and a transportation sector fueled with electricity, natural gas, and biofuels. For instance, California has a statutory renewable energy target of 33% renewables by 2020 and 50% by 2030. The state's renewable energy sector already employs over half a million of our residents and continues to grow. Opening new areas to offshore oil and gas extraction ignores our responsibility as leaders to plan for a sustainable future using affordable, renewable energy that will not put our precious coastal resources at risk.

We must emphasize that expanding offshore oil and gas drilling as a long-term strategy to meet our nation's energy needs is simply not sustainable from both an environmental and economic perspective. Consequently, we encourage the Trump administration to pursue a science-based, environmentally and economically sound national energy strategy that fosters the development of renewable energy sources, rather than opening up new areas for offshore oil and gas drilling. In closing, the California Ocean Protection Council urges you to withdraw from further consideration the inclusion of the California planning areas in the BOEM 2019–2024 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Sincerely,

John Laird

John Laird
Secretary for Natural Resources,
Chairman of the Ocean Protection Council

cc: Kelly Hammerle, National Program Manager, BOEM