



June 2, 2024

Wade Crowfoot
Chair, Ocean Protection Council
Members, Ocean Protection Council
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street, 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: June 4 OPC Meeting - Item 8

Dear Chair Crowfoot and Members of the Ocean Protection Council,

Monterey Bay Aquarium appreciates the work of OPC and the California Natural Resources Agency to prioritize essential science and environmental monitoring as the state finalizes its Strategic Plan for Offshore Wind Development. California has set ambitious renewable energy and decarbonization goals, including the deployment of offshore wind energy, and robust scientific information is vital to ensure the state also protects its marine wildlife and ecosystems.

Developing this science to advise responsible offshore wind development and meet the requirements of the state's environmental laws is imperative. Establishing a collaborative, multi-sector science entity to guide efficient, collaborative data collection supports the current and future work of California state agencies and reduces the likelihood of uncertainty and delays in meeting the state's climate goals. Cooperation to understand current environmental conditions and identify research questions will support California in pre-empting potential conflicts or unexpected mitigation needs, leading to long-term cost savings for the state, and will build our collective understanding of the environmental effects of offshore wind energy.

The Aquarium's mission is to inspire conservation of the ocean, starting with the incredible wildlife and ecosystems along the California coast. We raise awareness and encourage action for ocean health with millions of visitors, students, and online audience members each year. We work to improve ocean health by conducting scientific research, informing policy from the local to global level, and promoting market-based change, all with a large network of public and non-government partners. We also work with our science and technology partner, the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI), to apply cutting-edge technology and tools to support ocean conservation goals.

The science is clear: climate change and biodiversity loss are two of the biggest threats to the

health of our ocean and our planet. For several decades, the Aquarium has championed action to combat climate change while restoring and protecting the ocean and coast and the myriad services, including climate mitigation, they provide to our state and communities. There is a lot at stake as the California Current Ecosystem (CCE) is one of the most unique and productive bioregions on the planet. The development of offshore wind energy, particularly the novel floating systems that will be deployed off California, is a new industrial use of the CCE and presents many unknowns. To enable science-based, adaptive decision-making and adhere to the principles of precaution and stewardship for ocean resources, robust science and monitoring must be given precedence. We believe that California can and must transition to a renewable energy future in a way that prioritizes the prevention and mitigation of impacts from offshore wind energy on the CCE, other ocean uses, and California communities.

To achieve the transition to environmentally sustainable renewable energy, **we strongly support the establishment of an expert science entity** to guide the planning and prioritization of environmental monitoring and research related to offshore wind development in California and throughout the CCE. We welcome and commend the update provided by OPC expressing the agency's intent to establish a science entity and the proposed funding in the recent Budget Change Proposal (see attached support letter) to support the first phase of its development. We look forward to being active participants in that work.

Comprehensive environmental research and monitoring has a distinct purpose and clear benefits. It ensures the best available science can inform decisions on management and use of the ocean, advances efforts to coordinate diverse interested parties, can effectively allocate resources, and support collaborative data-sharing. A science entity will guide these processes, support data transparency, and shape adaptive management to build a strong foundation for connecting science and offshore wind planning decisions - this is especially important given the uncertainty about the impacts of floating offshore wind.

The rapid convening of participants from key sectors, including Tribes and Indigenous groups, to develop the vision, structure, and guidance for a science entity will be incredibly valuable and can build on the comprehensive monitoring guidance OPC is currently managing with the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation. There is an urgent need for planning comprehensive baseline data collection, identifying monitoring needs, and establishing data standards and protocols to keep pace with activities already underway in lease areas.

A science entity should be collaborative, supporting shared science and advancing collective understanding of the marine environment. It should be inclusive, bringing together state agencies, federal agencies, Tribal representatives, industry, and environmental organizations to work cooperatively on design, implementation, and oversight. Collaboration will facilitate transparency and greater certainty for the public, offshore wind developers, and decision-makers. The collection, review, and dissemination of the best available science-based data should build on existing knowledge to facilitate coordinated research and monitoring that

will identify and address data gaps, answer key questions about the environmental effects of offshore wind development, and ensure the information is available, accessible, and usable by decision-makers.

Understanding baseline conditions and developing ongoing monitoring of the environmental effects of offshore wind development will enable the state to identify, assess, and address the potential ecosystem impacts to meet its goal of developing offshore wind energy in a manner that protects coastal and marine ecosystems.

The Aquarium supports the swift development of this science entity and action by OPC to advance its establishment, and we stand ready to work with the state and OPC to assist in its creation.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Wolfrum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy Wolfrum
Director of California Policy and Government Affairs
Monterey Bay Aquarium



May 24, 2024

The Honorable Steve Bennett
 Chair, Assembly Budget Subcmt #4
 State Capitol
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Josh Becker
 Chair, Senate Budget Subcmt #2
 State Capitol
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel
 Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
 State Capitol
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Scott Wiener
 Chair, Senate Budget Committee
 State Capitol
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Funding for Ocean Protection Council in [Offshore Wind Energy Budget Change Proposal \(FY2425 ORG0540 BCP7530\)](#) - SUPPORT

Dear Chairs Bennett, Becker, Gabriel, and Wiener,

The undersigned organizations write to support the Administration's proposal to provide the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) with \$3 million to develop an offshore wind

environmental monitoring panel and \$600,000 for permanent positions to engage on offshore wind planning in California. We appreciate the Administration's recognition of the need for comprehensive and robust science to manage offshore wind development in the most environmentally responsible manner and the inclusion of this goal in this Budget Change Proposal.

This funding is a crucial and immediate first step and initial investment to establish an expert panel that can implement a comprehensive environmental research and monitoring program, help fill data gaps, convene key interested parties, and provide necessary information to ensure that the science needed for environmentally responsible offshore wind development advances on a timeline that keeps pace with and informs activities already underway. This scientific information is needed now and on an ongoing basis to inform decisions by developers and state planners. Establishing these structures now will help ensure deliberate and coordinated research, promote efficiencies, and deconflict ocean uses in the long-term.

The state has set ambitious goals for offshore wind energy development "in a manner that protects coastal and marine ecosystems to ensure avoidance, minimization, and mitigation of significant adverse impacts."¹ However, the impacts of offshore wind development on marine wildlife and ecosystems, particularly from the novel floating systems that will be deployed off the California coast, are unknown. The California Energy Commission Assembly Bill 525 Draft Offshore Wind Strategic Plan notes that "there is a great deal of uncertainty" about the impacts of floating offshore wind off California, and emphasizes the importance of working with the scientific community to "undertake robust scientific research to fill data gaps and better understand the potential impacts."

To identify and assess the impacts, inform mitigation and management measures, and ensure California meets the requirements of our environmental laws, robust monitoring and research is imperative. Establishing an expert panel that includes indigenous knowledge holders and a coordinated program now to guide efficient, collaborative data collection supports the current and future work of California state agencies and reduces the likelihood of uncertainty and delays in meeting the state's ambitious climate goals.

This will help ensure that offshore wind development in waters off our state is managed in a way that protects California's remarkable ocean wildlife and ecosystems. With site assessment activities already underway and developers starting to collect

¹ [AB-525 Energy: offshore wind generation](#), Section 1(m).

environmental data, the time is now to establish a process for advancing the needed science and aligning research to bring essential information together.

We appreciate your leadership and urge you to approve the requested funding to OPC in the final adopted budget.

Sincerely,

Amy Wolfrum
Director of California Policy and Government
Affairs
Monterey Bay Aquarium

Irene Gutierrez
Senior Attorney
Natural Resources Defense Council

Eleni Kounalakis
Lieutenant Governor
Office of Lieutenant Governor

Daniel Chandler
Steering Committee
350 Humboldt

Tomas Valadez
California Policy Associate
Azul

Eddie Ahn
Executive Director
Brightline Defense

Susan Jordan
Executive Director
California Coastal Protection Network

Daniel Gluesenkamp
Executive Director
California Institute for Biodiversity

Rikki Eriksen
Director of Marine Programs
California Marine Sanctuary Foundation

Deirdre DesJardins
Director
California Water Research

Jacqueline Tkac
President
California Association of Professional
Scientists – UAW

Stephen Rosenblum
Energy Team Lead
Climate Action California

Cherry Robinson
Coalitions Chair
Climate Reality Project San Diego

Pamela Flick
California Program Director
Defenders of Wildlife

Steven King
Clean Energy Advocate
Environment California

Azsha Hudson
Marine Conservation Analyst and Program
Manager
Environmental Defense Center

Matthew Simmons
Climate Attorney
Environmental Protection Information Center

Jennifer Kalt
Executive Director
Humboldt Waterkeeper

Amber Hewett
Senior Director, Offshore Wind Energy
National Wildlife Federation

Michael Stocker
Director
Ocean Conservation Research

Katerina Oskarsson
Executive in Residence
Redwood Region Climate and Community
Resilience Hub

Maimoona Block
Executive Director
Sea Hugger

Laura Walsh
California Policy Manager
Surfrider Foundation

Francisca Martinez
Deputy Chief of Staff
USC Schwarzenegger Institute

Pasha Feinberg
Director, Renewable Energy
Ocean Conservancy

Matthew Baker
Policy Director
Planning and Conservation League

Pauline Seales
Organizer
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network

Jason John
Acting Director
Sierra Club California

Manuel José Espinosa
Principal
The Phoenix Group

Dr. Elizabeth Dougherty
Executive Director
Wholly H2O