



## OCEANS

### Lawmakers hear whether marine sanctuaries should sink or swim

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*Published: Wednesday, June 28, 2017*

Lawmakers yesterday heard a range of opinions on the successes and downsides of marine sanctuaries during a Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation subcommittee hearing.

In April, President Trump issued an executive order that stops any new designations and requires a review of current sanctuaries.

Some witnesses noted economic gains from the sanctuaries, while others said the process for designations doesn't involve enough local consultation.

Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), chairman of the Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard, said that the National Marine Sanctuaries Act requires stakeholder engagement but that it does not require stakeholder information be used for decisionmaking.

The designation process gives the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration "virtually limitless" authority to set sanctuary regulations, he said.

Jeremiah O'Brien, the former president of the Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen's Organization in California, told lawmakers that "sanctuaries have a mixed scorecard at best."

O'Brien wondered how many more square miles of California's coast would become designated marine sanctuaries. He said the state currently has four, with two more being proposed.

O'Brien asked: "What is so special if everything on the coast is special?"

Conrad Lautenbacher, the NOAA administrator under President George W. Bush, said that the concept of marine sanctuaries was created with the best of intentions but noted that extensive negotiations may be needed to reach an agreement among the stakeholders.

The natural resources director of Aleutians East Borough in Alaska, Ernest Weiss, brought up the proposal to create an Aleutian marine sanctuary.

It was proposed by the group **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility** and later turned down by NOAA.

Weiss said he was not aware of any local support for the PEER proposal, which, he said, would be "engulfing our entire region."

He urged that proposals come from the local communities — an idea that was supported by another witness, Scott Hickman, owner of Circle H Outfitters in Texas.

Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.), the ranking member of the subcommittee, joked that if other areas don't want the sanctuaries, his state will take them.

"If they're not the right fit for other places, we would like to have them in the Great Lakes," Peters said.

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