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/](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),
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