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California fishing groups unite to fight offshore monuments that prohibit commercial fishing

July 7, 2016 -- A collection of more than 40 West Coast commercial and recreational fishing groups, working in conjunction with the National Coalition for Fishing Communities, has written to the White House, the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior, and officials in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, opposing the proposed designation of marine monuments off the coast of California that prohibit commercial fishing.

The letter is in direct response to a recent proposal calling on President Obama to declare virtually all Pacific seamounts, ridges, and banks (SRB's) off the California coast as National Monuments using his executive authority under the Antiquities Act. If enacted by executive order, the new monuments would permanently close virtually all of California's offshore SRB's to commercial fishing.

"[This proposal] was drafted and advanced behind closed doors with no public peer-reviewed scientific analysis, no [National Environmental Policy Act] analysis, and virtually no public engagement," the letter to the White House states. "The initial justification for this proposed action is filled with sensational, inaccurate statements and omissions. The economic analysis for the proposed closures grossly understates the importance and value of the identified [SRB's] to fisheries and fishing communities."

"Fisheries provide healthy food for people, and our fisheries are a well-managed renewable resource," the letter continues, noting that California already has the most strictly managed fisheries in the world.

Among the areas proposed for monument status are Tanner and Cortes Banks in southern California, which are critically important for many fisheries including tuna, swordfish, rockfish, spiny lobster, sea urchin, white seabass, mackerel, bonito, and market squid.

The proposal also called for the closures of Gorda and Mendocino Ridges in northern California, which are important grounds for the albacore tuna fishery.

As the letter states, closure of these important areas to commercial fishing would cause disastrous economic impacts to fishermen, seafood processors and allied businesses, fishing communities and the West Coast fishing economy. Even more important than the value of the fisheries is the opportunity cost of losing these productive fishing grounds forever.

Unilateral action under the Antiquities Act would also contradict the fully public and transparent process that currently exists under the federal Magnuson-Stevens Act. Such a designation would also conflict with the President's own [National Ocean Policy Plan](#), which promises "robust stakeholder engagement and public participation" in decision-making on ocean policy.

"We ask you stop the creation of these California offshore monuments under the Antiquities Act because monument status is irreversible, and the Antiquities Act process involves no science, no public involvement nor outreach to the parties who will be most affected by this unilateral action – no transparency," the letter concludes.

About NCFC

The [National Coalition for Fishing Communities](#) provides a national voice and a consistent, reliable presence for fisheries in the nation's capital and in national media. Comprised of fishing organizations, associations, and businesses from around the country, the NCFC helps ensure sound fisheries policies by integrating community needs with conservation values, leading with the best science, and connecting coalition members to issues and events of importance.