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PORT COMMISSIONERS:
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March 12, 2024

President Samantha Murray
California Fish and Game Commission
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

SUBJECT: Opposition to Marine Protected Area Regulation Change Petition 2023-33MPA

Dear President Murray:

The Santa Cruz Port District recognizes that properly designed and managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) play a critical role in protecting the natural diversity and abundance of marine life along the California Coast. Significant resources are required to manage California's extensive network of MPAs, and we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed regulation change petitions which are currently being considered by the Marine Resources Committee.

As you know, California's network of MPAs was developed by utilizing a science-based and highly collaborative stakeholder-driven planning process. This was done to ensure that California's MPAs had clearly defined objectives, were based on sound scientific guidelines, and accurately balanced both ecological and socioeconomic priorities by region.

Petition 2023-33MPA seeks, in part, to designate one new SMR off Pleasure Point and expand the boundary of one existing SMR off Natural Bridges for purposes of kelp forest preservation. The Santa Cruz Port District is writing to express its strong opposition to Petition 2023-33MPA and request that it be denied.

As proposed, Petition 2023-33MPA is extremely broad and would result in the wholesale elimination of commercial and recreational fishing opportunities in areas directly adjacent to Santa Cruz Harbor. The petition fails to provide regionally specific scientific substantiation to support its position, neglects to comprehensively evaluate the socioeconomic impacts associated with implementing and revising MPAs in locations directly adjacent to active fishing ports, and fails to work collaboratively with key regional stakeholders. If approved, Petition 2023-33MPA will significantly impact commercial and recreational fishing activities in the Monterey Bay, resulting in detrimental ramifications to the health and vitality of our coastal community.

The Santa Cruz Port District has been a longstanding collaborative partner with CDFW, performing extensive outreach and MPA education to the boating and fishing communities. We recognize that safeguarding the integrity of our region's ecosystem is critical, but oppose enacting regulation change petitions that seek wholesale elimination of fishing access, lack regionally specific scientific substantiation, and fail to garner input from key regional stakeholders. Accordingly, we request that action be taken to deny Petition 2023-33MPA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Reed".

Stephen Reed
Santa Cruz Port Commission Chair