

February 6, 2023

Representative Ken Helm, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
900 Court St. NE, H-490
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support House Bill 2903, Oregon Marine Reserve Program

Dear Chair Helm and Members of the Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water Committee:

Oceana supports House Bill 2903 which furthers Oregon's investment in the state's system of marine reserves and protected areas. This bill builds off the first decade of work to implement, monitor and study Oregon's five ocean reserves. These areas were carefully identified, they are important for ongoing scientific study, and they are instrumental for the conservation of our ocean.

The five sites, from Cape Falcon on the north coast, to Redfish Rocks in the south, encompass 9% of the Oregon Territorial Sea (shore to 3 nautical miles). They include a combination of fully protected marine reserves (~3%) and less protected but highly important marine protected areas (~6%) located adjacent to the reserves. Together, this system helps protect Oregon's nearshore marine ecosystem, habitats and marine life for present and future generations.

Now is an important time to invest in Oregon's marine reserve program. In 2012 the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 1510 which implemented recommendations to establish, study and monitor Oregon's marine reserves and protected areas. SB 1510 also mandated that a decadal review of the marine reserve program be presented to the legislature by March 2023. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Marine Reserve Program Synthesis Report¹ and subsequent Oregon State University Assessment Report² respond to this direction and provide valuable findings and recommendations for advancing and investing in the Marine Reserve Program. HB 2903 would require ODFW to carry out the report's recommendations and provide funding for implementation of the recommendations.

¹ ODFW Marine Reserve Program Synthesis Report. 2022. Available:
<https://oregonmarinereserves.com/2022/02/24/synthesis-report/>

² Hopf, J., B. Erickson, and J. Caselle et al. September 2022. 2022 Assessment of Oregon's Marine Reserves. Prepared for the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) of the Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC). Available: <https://www.oregonocean.info/index.php/opac-documents/workinggroups/stac/2741-or-marine-reserves-assessment-report-sept-30-2022/file>

Oceana is proud to have participated in the public process that led to the establishment of Oregon's first marine reserve system. These marine reserves brought together many Oregonians who care deeply about our coast. We know that networks of marine reserves, connected by ocean currents, can enhance the overall resilience of the nearshore marine ecosystem and help drive species diversity and productivity. These are proven tools to protect and sustain abundant and healthy populations of marine life. Yet these results take time and require a long-term commitment to conservation, monitoring and scientific research.

The State of Oregon has long recognized the importance of our coast and the great value of protecting a healthy ocean ecosystem. We must continue to sustain and advance that commitment. With increasing pressures on our ocean ecosystem from climate change, ocean acidification, and human uses, it's imperative that we protect Oregon's important ocean habitats and special places.

We strongly urge you to vote for HB 2903 to advance the Oregon Marine Reserve Program and protect and sustain our ocean ecosystem.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Enticknap", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Ben Enticknap
Pacific Campaign Manager and Senior Scientist