



Northern Chumash Tribal Council

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HNRC Written Testimony - Violet Sage Walker

I am Violet Sage Walker, Chairwoman of the Northern Chumash Tribal Council and nominator of the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. Thank you for the opportunity to share my input.

What weighs heavy on my mind is an inherited obligation indigenous people have to protect our homelands. As climate change intensifies, our future as a coastal maritime people becomes more complex and uncertain. Tribal people have historically worked with governments and stakeholders to care for the lands, animals, plants, and water. We have always wanted to participate.

The Northern Chumash Tribal Council is known for showing up and putting in the hard work to make sure development is smart and considers the impacts, not just for today, but for next 7 generations. I don't know what our future will look like without bold and decisive action to combat climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and advancing renewable energy. We are hopeful we will never find out. But in that same breath, we must also preserve what makes our homeland spectacular, that is our beaches, ocean and viewshed.

We are being asked to weigh in on the Morro Bay wind farm leases and how these renewable energy projects will impact our homeland, our cultural landscape, all for the greater good. When we were asked to participate in the process, we knew that our role would be to help ensure that offshore wind energy go forward in a good way. We knew that we must try to guide the process in order to prevent offshore wind from continuing some of the same problems as offshore oil. We have lived with 3 generations of the destructive effects of oil spills and pollution on the California Central Coast. We - like the majority of all people - want to see an end to offshore oil, but only so long as we are not replacing one foe with another.

This is why my family has fought so hard to protect and preserve our coastline. Ocean conservation is equally as important as renewable energy projects, and must be advanced simultaneously and with as much commitment. This commitment means formally designating the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. It also means greater support for ocean conservation efforts from the federal government, offshore wind companies, and local municipalities. We need to be all in for both.

This is why I'm here today: to share that offshore wind must be framed differently. We need a new model that doesn't talk about competing interests, that doesn't exclude conservation, marine sanctuaries, tribal people, or marginalized communities. The advancement of offshore wind needs to be a collaborative process - not a combative one. We need to ensure our wind farm lessees are who we want our grandchildren to be partners with. Because many of us will not be here to see the end of the windfarm leases.

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So today, I ask you to consider the impacts of these leases in 40 years. How do we ensure that the communities along the Central Coast, ports like Long Beach, and others don't come to regret this? How do we ensure collaborative partnership with wind farm lessees today and in the distant future?

As we talk about subsidies, economic benefits, and new jobs, let's also discuss marine biology, ecology and supporting healthy oceans. We also need to invest in marine mammal rescuers, bird rescue centers, wildlife care facilities, aquaculture, and water sampling facilities. We should consider writing the leases so that the animals and plants get a share of the subsidies. So that the environmental organizations who protect them are not unduly burdened with the inevitable impacts that will come with constructing a large wind farm off our coast.

We also must be assured that we not only advance the Chumash Heritage sanctuary designation, but also that wind farm lessees will partner with and support National Marine Sanctuaries and not attempt to prevent, undermine, or dissolve them. This assurance is not just for the tribes, but also for the communities that have been seeking lasting protection of the coastline and the view shed, which is a major reason many people choose to live here. The Chumash Heritage sanctuary will combat pollution as well as enhance water quality, the tourist economy, and commercial and recreational fisheries. The health of our ocean is inherently tied to the health of our communities.

Indigenous people have been environmental stewards since time immemorial. Today Tribal communities around the world are addressing massive climate problems – water quality, fire management, fisheries, and land management - to protect their homes and provide a healthy thriving place for all people. This is the great irony of the situation we find ourselves in: that we have been fighting the problems we did not create or ever support in the first place.

Despite this, there is no language in the offshore wind leases that addresses one of the most significant tribal priorities, which is the impact of onshore landing and infrastructure being placed on our sacred sites, cemeteries, ancestral villages, and lands. These lands should be preserved and returned to the tribes for restoration and for their participation in the Blue Economy. The tribes should not be made to wait another three generations to reclaim our sites in Morro Bay and Diablo Canyon. Let's negotiate now that the lands be restored and returned to the tribes and not leave their status uncertain for even a minute longer.

We must also use this opportunity to correct for the legacies of inequity. The common methods of tribal participation offer fleeting benefits to tribal communities, if any at all. Merely hiring a tribal liaison is the same as putting tribes on volunteer advisory councils. We need to do better and have concrete language to facilitate meaningful relationships between lessees and the tribes and the land. Inequity in the Green Economy can be seen everywhere. It can be seen in the effects of massive solar farms on the Carrizo

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Plain and Central California wind projects which have failed to help the communities they impacted most directly. There are communities with multi-million dollar energy projects that don't have cell service, reliable internet, decent roads or water quality.

We must work harder to ensure that tribal communities, rural farming and agriculture communities, and communities of color who are directly impacted by renewable energy projects also benefit from them in meaningful, lasting ways. Anything less is an injustice to future generations and our homelands.

As decisions on offshore wind leases are soon made that will have lasting impacts, I ask you to proceed thoughtfully and inclusively. To make wise choices, our people take a long term view. Our vision is of many generations in the future knowing that we won't be around to see all of the impacts of the decisions we make today. I will likely be walking with the ancestors before these wind farm leases are up. I ask myself what legacy will I leave for my nephew and relatives to clean up, restore or repair?

The promises we make today need to last to the end. We need to ensure that we are not creating problems for our children's children - that they don't have to continue the same cycles of uncertainty. How do we end the cycles? It takes cooperation, connection, and collective action. If we are all working towards the same goals then we can use new, less competitive, and more collaborative management methods.

Let me be clear: the Northern Chumash Tribal Council supports wind energy projects. We have been working with BOEM, federal and state agencies, and potential applicants for years now. Our primary concern is that wind farms are sited with careful environmental consideration in consultation with local tribes, communities, and scientific experts. We support the designation of the Morro Bay Wind Energy Area, a zone 20 miles offshore to balance extensive tribal and public input with industry interest and minimize conflicts with environmental and cultural values.

We have been trying to protect our home and lands since time immemorial. Today we ask that our heritage, input, and Traditional Knowledge be valued, and that offshore wind leases be used to repair the cultural and environmental damage of the last two centuries as well as lay an equitable and inclusive foundation for the Blue Economy - one that meaningfully includes the Native people.

Thank you,

Violet Sage Walker

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Offshore Wind and Ocean Conservation Must be Framed Collaboratively –

Renewable energy projects and conservation must be framed in collaborative and not competitive or combative terms. Designating the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary will ensure the protection of our sacred lands, waters, and heritage sites by providing ecosystem-based management of the area, foreclosing new oil and gas development while allowing for clean renewable energy from carefully sited offshore wind farms.

Advancing offshore wind to generate carbon-free electricity to fight climate change, reduce air pollution, and support thousands of well-paying jobs is also critical for our future. We must also ensure that offshore wind is developed with the most substantial level of protection in place for vulnerable coastal and marine habitats and wildlife. This approach will protect the marine environment and support this important new industry.

Offshore Wind energy can be developed in alignment with important initiatives including the Blue Economy, 30x30 policies, California's climate goals, and tribally-led global climate change efforts. Protected ocean places can better withstand the impacts of a changing climate and prevent destructive and unnecessary man-made disturbances such as offshore oil drilling. The ocean stores 50 times more carbon dioxide than the atmosphere and much of that is held in wetlands and seagrass beds, both of which are found within the proposed Chumash Heritage sanctuary. If disturbed, these sites can release carbon back into the atmosphere, further contributing to climate change. Offshore wind efforts and the proposed sanctuary cannot and must not be pitted against each other in a win/lose fashion. Both are necessary to make meaningful progress to combat climate change.

Relationship between Offshore Wind and the Proposed Chumash Heritage sanctuary –

The National Marine Sanctuaries Act requires agencies whose actions are "likely to destroy, cause the loss of, or injure a sanctuary resource" to consult with the marine sanctuary program before taking such action. NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is then required to recommend reasonable alternatives to protect sanctuary resources.

Therefore we believe there is room to support the transmission necessary to get energy from offshore projects outside sanctuary boundaries, through California State Tidelands, and to shore. We would like ONMS to examine and consider the impacts of creating a regulatory framework necessary to allow transmission cables through the sanctuary. This decision would have some precedent—Olympic Coast NMS has two submarine fiber optic cables within its boundaries. NOAA could use research on the impacts of

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those cables to better understand the potential impacts of transmission for offshore wind, and to inform necessary requirements for permit conditions for such a use within the proposed Chumash Heritage sanctuary. As an example, if cables proposed to run from offshore wind platforms to an onshore substation might impact a critical sea otter habitat, oversight by a marine sanctuary will help result in optimal placement.

It is our intent and desire to consult and advise potential EIR and related activities to develop offshore wind in order to balance equally important conservation needs to protect ecosystems in the proposed sanctuary.

Environmental Justice in Social Equity and Economy –

As Secretary of Interior, Deb Halland noted, “The climate crisis disproportionately impacts communities of color and low-income families. As our country faces the interlocking challenges of a global pandemic, economic downturn, racial injustice, and the climate crisis – we have to transition to a brighter future for everyone.”

Offshore Wind should provide for impacts on under-resourced and historically-excluded communities and seek meaningful concrete guarantees from local tribes, specifically Chumash tribes who are directly affiliated with the two onshore landing sites of Morro Bay and Point Buchon Diablo Canyon. The two sites have been exploited for the past 50-100 years. These are sacred sites, cemeteries, burial grounds, and traditional village sites. They have been abused for the past 4 generations. We have been denied access to the places where our ancestors rest and we are unable to properly hold ceremonies there. Barricades literally and figuratively have been constructed to keep our people away from our two biggest village sites here in Morro Bay and in Avila Beach. It is not nearly enough for us to concede that we will have a tribal liaison to work with; that is no guarantee that what we want will be done. We want our lands restored to us. Part of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant decommissioning and the reconciliation to the tribes is to give the land back. We see no outreach and effort on the part of BOEM or the stakeholders or the applicants to address the issues of land back.

Subsidies and Incentives Must be Equitable –

Chumash traditional ecological knowledge can and should be used to help protect ecosystems and wildlife. Global climate change poses a great risk to marine life. However, using Indigenous people in this can also be exploitative when Indigenous people are asked to participate in a volunteer capacity or serve on advisory panels to solve problems created by the wealthy. Resources and subsidies should be considered to create paid positions for Indigenous people to be compensated for their work taking care of marine resources like improving water quality and preserving aquatic habitats.

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