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OFFICE OF THE PROVOST AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT – ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

DIRECTOR, NATURAL RESERVE SYSTEM

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RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA

VIA FACSIMILE AND U.S. MAIL (916 653-8102)

October 21, 2009

Cathy Reheis-Boyd, Chair
Blue Ribbon Task Force
MLPA Initiative
c/o California Natural Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Proposed Marine Protected Area encompassing Scripps Coastal Reserve, La Jolla (currently, the San Diego-Scripps Marine Life Refuge)

Dear Chairperson Reheis-Boyd:

I am writing on behalf of the University of California Natural Reserve System (NRS) to offer enthusiastic support for the continuing marine protection of the University's Scripps Coastal Reserve (Reserve), known historically as the San Diego-Scripps Marine Life Refuge, provided that any protected designation of it will allow the continuation of collecting for scientific and well-defined educational purposes. As one of the Trustee Agencies under the California Environmental Quality Act with respect to NRS reserves, we strongly recommend the designation of the Reserve as a State Marine Reserve or a State Marine Conservation Area, which would ensure the level of protection necessary to sustain the Reserve goals of supporting research and teaching activities and, more broadly, conservation of the State's valuable marine resources.

The continuation of marine protection, in whatever form it may ultimately be decided, together with the Reserve terrestrial zone will ensure the quality and scope of marine resources that will be available for current and future scientific exploration. As an ecologically rich and significant area, this Reserve is intrinsically worthy of conservation: the unique andesite rocky intertidal supports a rich and well-studied flora and fauna, including the most southern self-sustaining population of the native mussel, *Mytilus edulis*, and therefore the starfish (*Pisaster ochreus*) that prefer them as prey; the sandy beach is allowed to accumulate marine detritus which results in a rich fauna that supports many shore birds; the nearshore hosts large schools of bait fish which are preyed upon by mammalian, avian and fish predators; flatfish ranging from guitarfish to juvenile halibut find refuge in the shallows, and squid spawn and hatch in large numbers in the sandy subtidal flats. The uplands and canyons of the Reserve support rare forms of southern maritime scrub, southern coastal bluff scrub, and coastal sage scrub, including many sensitive plant species and the federally listed California gnatcatcher. Permanent protection will provide exceptional opportunities to study the long-term impacts of marine protection on fragile and dwindling marine resources.

The NRS further supports the *expansion* of the existing San Diego-Scripps Marine Life Refuge by including, at the very least, the north edge of Dike Rock; sandy submarine flats for squid spawning; and the Scripps branch of the La Jolla Submarine canyon, as depicted on the attached map. The Scripps branch of the La Jolla submarine canyon that would be included in the proposed Reserve is a unique ecosystem resulting from the interactions of biological, hydrologic and geologic characteristic: The steep hard rock walls drop rapidly to 300 meters within 2 km from shore. Large amounts of marine detritus (kelp, other seaweeds, surfgrass, animal carcasses and waste) and terrestrial plant material and sediments from streams and lagoons are deposited by the Oceanside littoral cell in the head of the canyon, and support a detritus-based food web with some of the highest levels of secondary productivity observed on the planet, in the form of massed invertebrates. In conjunction with the canyon being a conduit for deepwater species to the near shore, this results in huge productivity of fish biomass not found in the surrounding areas. This proposed expansion will enhance Reserve research and educational opportunities.

Conservation of habitats, ecosystems, and biodiversity at our reserves is critical to supporting the University's core research and teaching mission. Our 36 NRS reserves include seven coastal sites, five of which, in addition to the Scripps Coastal Reserve, already adjoin or lie within following MPAs: Big Creek SMR, adjacent to the Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve; White Rock and Cambria SMCAs, adjacent to the Kenneth Norris Rancho Marino Reserve; the expanded Año Nuevo SMCA, adjacent to the Año Nuevo Island Reserve; Bodega SMR, adjacent to the Bodega Marine Reserve; and the Natural Bridges Intertidal SMR, adjacent to the Younger Lagoon Reserve. The broad conservation goals of the Marine Life Protection Act (Act) are, in our view, entirely consistent with and complementary to the NRS mission, which is "to contribute to the understanding and wise management of the Earth and its natural systems by supporting university-level teaching, research, and public service at protected natural areas throughout California." It bears noting that the fishing regulations within SMRs that allow only for research and educational take of marine species are consonant with NRS programmatic goals; the same level of protection from fishing is desirable for the San Diego-Scripps Marine Life Refuge.

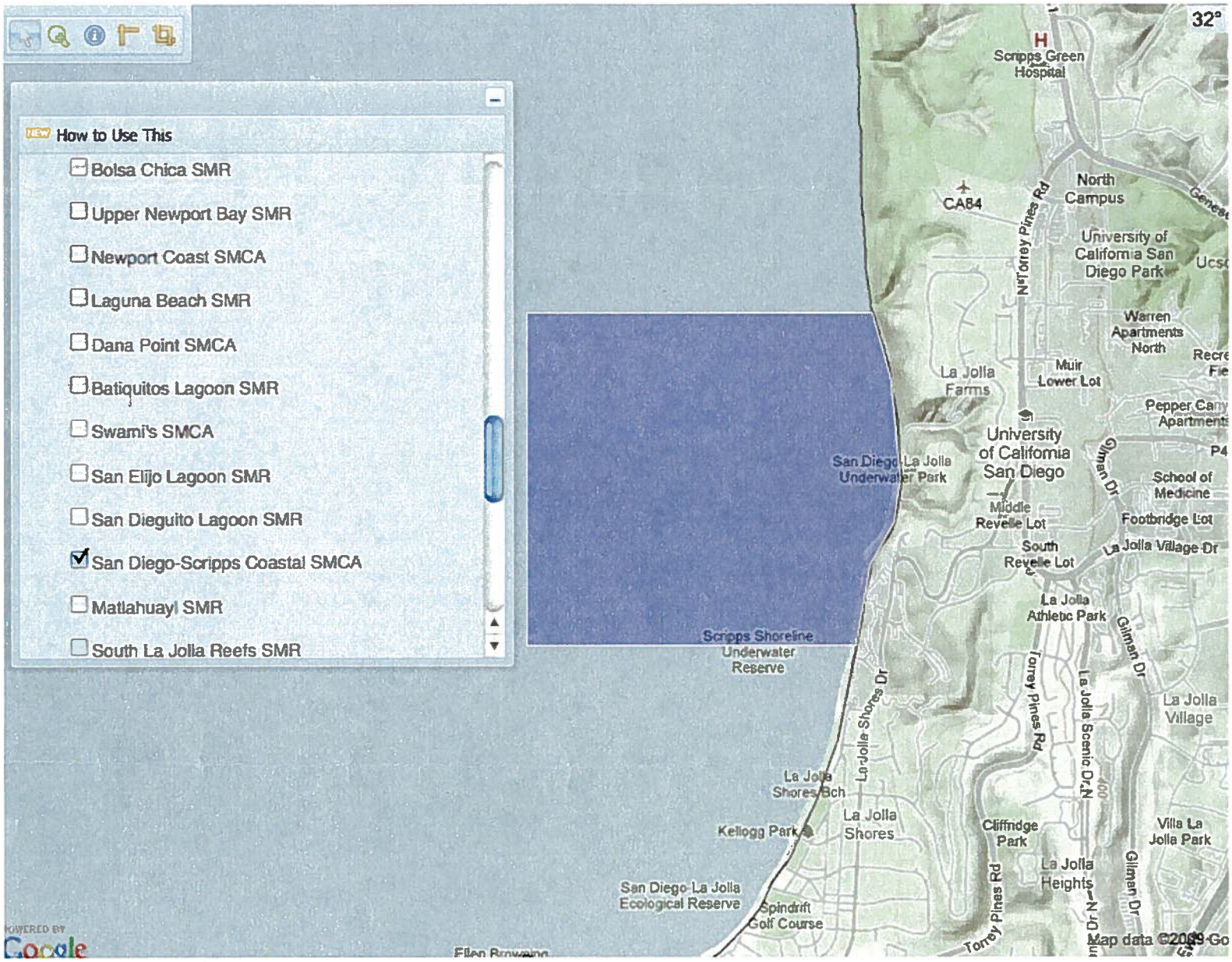
In closing, because the presence of MPAs has greatly enriched NRS reserves, the NRS strongly endorses the continued protection of the San Diego-Scripps Marine Life Refuge under an appropriate designation and its expansion, which would provide a significant protected marine resource. Retaining the Reserve within the larger network of MPAs will help achieve the goals of the Act. In the face of increasing environmental problems, we cannot afford not to extend these protections. Unlocking the secrets to marine life through increased research at these expanded protected areas could eventually lead to solutions to a number of problems, such as depleted fisheries, thereby providing valuable socio-economic benefits to the people of California. Finally, by providing the largest possible MPAs, the Fish and Game Commission will create an important natural area legacy for future generations of Californians.

Sincerely,

A. N. Glazer

Alexander N. Glazer
Director
Natural Reserve System

cc: Isabelle Kay, Director, Scripps Coastal Reserve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