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December 9, 2011

The Honorable John Laird
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
1330 Broadway, Suite 1100
Oakland, California 94612

RE: Support for Implementation of AB 2125 and Development of a Geoportal

Dear Secretary Laird and Members of the Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Ocean Protection Council's efforts to advance implementation of AB 2125 and potential development of a "geoportal." We support your staff's recommendation to authorize development "of an agreement with the California Technology Agency to support the integration of California's coastal and marine geospatial data into a state internet-based 'geoportal' to improve access to these data by agencies, stakeholders, and the general public". The Ocean Protection Council has a long track record of investments in high-quality geospatial information, such as support for collection for statewide bathymetry and LIDAR data. We view the proposed geoportal as a logical next step towards greatly increasing the usability of these quite significant past investments.

As the legislative sponsor for AB 2125, Ocean Conservancy is a strong supporter of improving state agencies' use and sharing of scientific and geospatial information for coastal and ocean decision-making, including marine spatial planning as required under Public Resources Code Section 35620. We believe that better use of geospatial information can enhance California's ability to manage its coastal and ocean ecosystem. We also believe that promoting agency collaboration on data sharing will lead to both greater administrative efficiency and improved ecological outcomes. We view development of a data portal as an important first step towards implementation of AB 2125.

As a participant in the statewide Marine Life Protection Act Initiative, Ocean Conservancy is very familiar with the benefits of the MarineMap tool. Our experience with MarineMap convinced us of the unique value of geospatial information and tools to improve both the public's ability to understand complex policy issues and participate in decisionmaking as well as the quality of decisions made. It is our understanding that the goal of the proposed geoportal for ocean and coastal data is to similarly improve citizen understanding and participation in decisions about our ocean and coastal resources more broadly as well as to improve decisionmaking broadly.

Recognizing that public resources, including those available to the Ocean Protection Council, are quite limited, we urge the Ocean Protection Council to pursue external funding and partnerships where

possible to advance future steps of this project. As an initial step, the OPC should develop a work plan and budget for the first steps of geoportal development – both for the geoportal itself but also for the development of an effective institutional and governance framework to ensure the utility and durability of the project.

The proposal before you is modest first step towards a long-term goal of improved decisionmaking and ultimately better ecosystem protection for our coast and ocean. We urge OPC support for this first step and also a longer-term commitment to strategically advance use of geospatial information statewide, consistent with the requirements of AB 2125.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Karil Gaffney in black ink.

Pacific Program Director