

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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RESOLUTION BY THE CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION REQUESTING THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION TO UNDERTAKE A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF THE STATUS OF THE CALIFORNIA GRAY WHALE

Whereas: The California Coastal Commission was established by the People of California through initiative statute in 1972 and made permanent in 1976 by the California Legislature as the State's principal coastal management agency to, among other goals and objectives, "... protect marine fisheries, and other ocean resources ...(and) ensure conformity with the provisions of...(the California Coastal Act)...to protect ...state and national interests in assuring the maintenance of the long-term productivity and economic vitality of coastal resources necessary for the well-being of the people of the state..."; and

Whereas: The California Coastal Act also provides that "(s)pecial protection shall be given to ... (marine) species of special biological or economic significance ..." and that in order "...to avoid long-term costs to the public and a diminished quality of life resulting from the misuse of coastal resources, to coordinate and integrate the activities of the many agencies whose activities impact the coastal zone, and to supplement their activities in matters not properly within the jurisdiction of any existing agency, it is necessary to provide for continued state coastal planning and management through a state coastal commission;" and

Whereas: The California gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*) migrates 8,500-11,000 miles annually along the coast of California, between its winter breeding and calving grounds in Mexico and its summer feeding grounds in the Arctic; and

Whereas: The California gray whale contributes significantly to the economic viability of coastal communities by supporting a multi-million dollar whale watching and eco-tourism industry; and

Whereas: The California gray whale has an immeasurable intrinsic value to current and future generations; and

Whereas: The California gray whale migrates past one of the most heavily industrialized and urbanized coastlines in the world, exposing the species to marine pollution, marine vessel traffic, industrial noise, activities associated with the development of outer continental shelf resources, fishing entanglements, bottom trawling, industrial development, and military and civilian sonar activity; and

Whereas: The federal government placed the gray whale on the endangered and threatened species list in 1970 when its estimated population was approximately 12,000 and removed it in 1994 when the population rose to 23,000; and

Whereas: The significant threats posed by global warming, melting sea ice, ocean acidification, and the impact of increased sea water temperature, especially in the Arctic feeding grounds of the California gray whale have very serious negative implications for the species; and

Whereas: The dramatic increase in mortality during the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 migrations may have reduced the population by half, and demonstrate that the species is experiencing increasing stress from external factors; and

Whereas: Pre-whaling population estimates used as a factor in determining species recovered status of the gray whale are now known to have been erroneous and account for only a fraction of actual historical populations; and

Whereas: There have been no reliable population estimates published by the National Marine Fisheries Service since 2001; and

Whereas: The continued health and viability of the California gray whale population is dependent upon, among other factors, all states and countries along the migration route maintaining safe and adequate habitat for feeding, breeding and calving; and

Whereas: There is no habitat protection for the Pacific Coast Feeding Aggregation in California, Oregon, or Washington State; and

Whereas: There are inconsistencies in the protection states give to gray whales;

Therefore, Be it Resolved: That the California Coastal Commission respectfully requests the United States Congress and the President of the United States to call upon the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to undertake an immediate and comprehensive evaluation and assessment of the status of California gray whale population. This assessment should include all current research relating to migration routes, population dynamics, and mortality, and the impacts of stressor forces affecting the health and viability of California gray whale populations, including the impact of global warming on critical feeding grounds; and

Be it further Resolved: That the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration publish, and make available for public information and review, the results of its comprehensive assessment of the status of the California gray whale; and

Be it further Resolved: That, if the results of the comprehensive assessment or the body of scientific evidence warrants it, the status of the California gray whale pursuant to the Endangered Species Act be changed to threatened or endangered; and

Be it further Resolved: That the Executive Director transmit copies of this resolution to NOAA, the President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Majority Leader of the Senate, and to California's Congressional delegation.

Bonnie Neely

Bonnie Neely, Chair

Mary Stallenberger

Mary Stallenberger, Vice-Chair

This resolution was adopted by the California Coastal Commission on

January 14, 2010 by a 12 to 0 vote.