

February 27, 2017

To: Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

From: Jena Carter, Marine and Coastal Director, The Nature Conservancy in Oregon

Re: Testimony in Support of SB 276

Chair Dembrow and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 276. The Conservancy applauds Senators Roblan and Riley and Representative McKeown for introducing this important bill and enthusiastically support the bill for the reasons stated below. Through this testimony we also describe a few recommendations for strengthening the measure we hope the sponsors and the committee will take under consideration.

As The West Coast Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia Science Panel (the “Panel”) found, global carbon dioxide emissions over the past two centuries have fundamentally altered the chemistry of the world’s oceans, threatening the health of coastal ecosystems and industries that depend upon the marine environment. Although ocean acidification is a global phenomenon, emerging research shows that the West Coast of North America will face some of the earliest, most severe changes in ocean carbon chemistry.

The Panel’s scientific experts provided six major findings of their research. Notably, the Panel found that ocean acidification and hypoxia will intensify over time, diminishing opportunities for communities to adapt and rendering future management interventions far less effective.

By declaring the state’s policy on ocean acidification and hypoxia and establishing the Oregon Coordinating Council on Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia (the “Coordinating Council”), SB 276 proactively tackles the Panel’s finding and helps ensure a brighter future for Oregon. Ocean acidification and hypoxia are multi-stressor challenges that will require new levels of agency coordination and collaboration. The proposed policy and Coordinating Council will facilitate cross jurisdictional action. The inclusion of stakeholders and scientific participation on the Coordinating Council will help to ensure that research and monitoring actions are based upon ocean users and decision-makers’ needs.

To help further strengthen SB 276 and its potential impact, the Conservancy respectfully submits the following ideas:

- Section 2(1). The membership of the Oregon Coordinating Council on Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia does not include federal agencies, such as the National Oceanic Administration or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Expanding the membership of the Coordinating Council to include at least one federal agency could

foster dialogue between Oregon and the federal government, and potentially lead to increased funding, research, and partnerships that could amplify the actions of the Coordinating Council.

- Section 2(2)(b). This section notes that members of the Coordinating Council are eligible for reappointment; however, it is unclear how many terms a member can consecutively serve, opening the possibility for a member to serve indefinitely. We suggest adding language limiting the number of consecutive terms a member can serve on the Coordinating Council. Requiring members to take a break after a certain number of consecutive terms allows room for new members and the occasional fresh perspective.
- Section 3. The activities of the Coordinating Council focus on research, monitoring, documenting impacts and increasing public awareness, among other items. These activities are needed and will produce new knowledge; however, The Nature Conservancy has seen in other locations that these activities alone do not translate to on-the-ground action or result in necessary changes in policy or decision-making. The Conservancy suggests new language in SB 276 that calls upon the Coordinating Council to develop an Action Plan that provides ideas and recommendations for on-the-ground mitigation and adaptation actions that can take place in Oregon as well as needed policy changes.
- Section 3. Aside from a report to the Legislature, the Coordinating Council does not have any deadlines governing its activities. Deadlines can be a compelling driver for agencies and others to work together and produce results. The Conservancy proposes adding deadlines to key activities contained within Section 3.

In closing, this bill can serve as a model for other states. We look forward to working with you to advance SB 276 and maximize its positive impact.

Thank you again for your attention to this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me, Jena Carter, or our State Government Relations Director, Amanda Rich, if you have questions.