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The Honorable Ken Helm, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Legislature

Dear Chair Helm and Members of the Committee,

I write to provide testimony on [HB 2903](#), specifically the processes, breadth and rigor of the scientific and technical work underpinning the [2002 Marine Reserves Assessment Report](#) that informs this bill. I am the director of the Oregon Sea Grant program, based at Oregon State University, and a marine ecologist with expertise in the science of marine reserves and protected areas. I also serve as the chair of the [scientific and technical advisory committee](#) of the [Ocean Policy Advisory Council](#) that was charged with providing the Marine Reserves Assessment Report.

The OPAC scientific and technical advisory committee was charged by [SB 1510](#) (passed in 2012) to submit a report to the Legislative Assembly regarding the establishment, study, monitoring, evaluation and enforcement of the pilot marine reserves, marine reserves, marine protected areas and seabird protection area described in [ORS 196.540](#). It further specified that the report should be prepared by a public university listed in [ORS 352.002](#) chosen by the scientific and technical advisory committee and should include:

- An assessment of social, economic and environmental factors related to the reserves and protected areas;
- Recommendations for administrative actions and legislative proposals related to the reserves and protected areas; and
- Any other scientifically based information related to the reserves and protected areas that the public university described in this subsection deems relevant or material.

A [background brief](#) on Oregon's Marine Reserves prepared by the Legislative Policy and Research Office in 2018 provides additional context. Briefly, there are five [marine reserves](#) in Oregon that are managed and scientifically monitored by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The process to designate marine reserves in Oregon began in 2008 with Governor Kulongoski ([EO 08-07](#)) directing OPAC to recommend up to nine sites for possible designation as marine reserves. The establishment of five reserves, Otter Rock and Redfish Rocks in 2009 ([HB 3031](#)) and Cape Perpetua, Cascade Head, and Cape Falcon in 2012 (SB 1510), was preceded by input from community teams that informed OPAC recommendations (in [2008](#) and [2010](#)).

In 2021, the OPAC scientific and technical advisory committee (STAC) issued a [request for proposals](#) to conduct the legislatively-mandated assessment of Oregon's Marine Reserves. The main deliverable requested was a scholarly review of the marine reserves process and outcomes since 2008 extensively documented by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in their [Marine Reserves Synthesis Report: 2009-2021](#).

The scientific team that researched and wrote the 2022 Marine Reserves Assessment Report was selected through an open, competitive, peer-reviewed process. Dr. Will White (Oregon State University) led the scientific team which included additional researchers from OSU and other universities. The team has decades of combined experience in marine reserve science and brings strong multidisciplinary expertise in natural sciences (marine ecology, fisheries, oceanography) and social sciences (environmental economics, psychology, and communication).

In 2022, Dr. White provided the OPAC STAC an initial draft of the Marine Reserves Assessment Report and presented the report at our July 2022 meeting. The STAC provided written peer reviews and discussed them with Dr. White at our August 2022 STAC meeting. Dr. White delivered a revised final report to the STAC. We

approved the final version for transmission to the Legislative Assembly at our September 2022 STAC meeting. The STAC conducted a transparent review process, with the written reviews and responses and the recordings of review discussions from our public meetings available on the [STAC webpage](#).

Dr. White and I also presented the report to the OPAC on September 29, 2022. The OPAC agreed by consensus with the findings and recommendations in the report and expressed its support for the recommended actions including continued funding and additional allocations for the marine reserve program in the ODFW budget in a [letter to the Governor on October 25, 2022](#).

In conclusion, the 2022 Marine Reserves Assessment Report, including its findings and recommendations which inform HR 2903, has a very robust scientific and technical basis. Dr. White is providing separate written testimony on the 2022 Marine Reserves Assessment Report, and I refer you to his testimony for additional information about the report. I remain available to respond to any questions that members of the committee may have.

I thank the members of this committee, Representative Gomberg and the additional co-sponsors of HR 2903, Representatives Javadi, Wright, and Weber and Senators Anderson and Smith, for your leadership and shared vision of a productive and vibrant coastal ocean for current and future generations of Oregonians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karina J. Nielsen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

Karina J. Nielsen, Ph.D.
Director Oregon Sea Grant
Chair Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee, Ocean Policy Advisory Council