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April 10, 2008

The Honorable James Connaughton
Chairman
Council on Environmental Quality
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Chairman Connaughton:

I am writing to express my concern with the Islands in the Stream proposal being considered by the Administration to establish a series of protected marine areas in the Gulf of Mexico. I have written you before regarding this proposal and we spoke about it in St. Michaels last fall. The proposal as I understand it, would seek to connect a chain of marine conservation areas encircling the entire Gulf of Mexico. These areas could be "proclaimed" under the Antiquities Act or the President could direct NOAA to establish them under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

As you know, I have been a tireless advocate for protecting critical marine habitat and conserving fishery resources through my work with the Coastal Conservation Association. However, I feel strongly that designating these marine monuments without an open public process and thorough review of the size and need of the potential restricted marine areas will have significant adverse effects on the recreational fishing community.

The use of the Antiquities Act will not provide the opportunity for public comment before potential marine designations are established in the Gulf, nor any review on the need for the marine monuments on a continuing basis. I supported the amendment to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2006 that requires an ongoing review and a public process for any marine restricted areas. The Islands in the Stream proposal is completely inconsistent with these new legal authorities and I would request not utilizing the Antiquities Act to create marine areas in the Gulf of Mexico.

As for the President directing the sanctuaries program to create these areas, I am equally troubled. The NOAA sanctuaries program has a mandate that is presently being fulfilled by the sanctuaries in the Gulf. CCA has been supportive of the creation of most of the national sanctuaries and continues to be so. However, the role of that program is very limited geographically and should not be expanded as

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The Honorable James Connaughton

Page 2

April 10, 2008

this proposal would do. The process of its creation will only further confuse the authority lines between the Councils and the sanctuaries and is most likely to result in the creation of extensive controversy, where none is necessary. If these areas are environmentally sensitive and warrant protection, there is ample authority under the existing laws to protect them without expanding the sanctuaries program.

If CCA or I can be of further assistance, please call Bob Hayes or Matt Paxton.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Wally", written in dark ink.

Walter W. Fondren, III
Chairman