

**Statement of  
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Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior  
House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
H.R. 4233, Incorporating Rocks and Small Islands into the California Coastal National  
Monument  
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 4233, which would incorporate rocks and small islands along the coast of Orange County, California into the California Coastal National Monument and remove an unused lighthouse reservation. The Department of the Interior supports the conservation goals of H.R. 4233 and would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee to address some concerns with the bill's management language discussed in more detail below.

**Background**

The California coast is rugged and spectacular, representing one of the nation's most iconic and treasured landscapes. Millions of visitors travel up and down the California coast each year, stopping at coastal towns and vista points to experience breathtaking views and spectacular scenery and to observe an abundance of wildlife along the coast. In 2000, Presidential Proclamation 7264 established the California Coastal National Monument, administered by the Bureau of Land Management and comprising over 20,000 islands, rocks, and pinnacles along the 1,100 mile California coast. In 2014, Presidential Proclamation 9089 added the Point Arena-Stornetta unit, which included 1,665 acres of public land along the coastline. This area provides a mainland base for access and interpretation and plays a critical role in enhancing the public's enjoyment, appreciation, and understanding of the California Coastal National Monument.

The Orange County Rocks and Islands consist of more than 40 offshore rocks, pinnacles, exposed reefs, and small islands, totaling less than two acres at the mean high tide level. These features are located within one mile of the Pacific coast of Orange County. These offshore rocks and small islands are valued by nearby Coastal communities for their scenic, conservation and recreation values and contain nationally significant historical, cultural, natural, and scientific resources.

In 1931, Congress reserved the Orange County Rocks and Islands for park, scenic, or other public purposes and in 1935, amended the reservation for lighthouse construction and navigation. Because of these legislative withdrawals, the rocks were not incorporated into the California Coastal National Monument. Nonetheless, the rocks contain unique geologic formations and provide some of the last remaining undisturbed offshore habitat in southern California for a wide variety of migratory and resident birds and marine mammals and a rich diversity of upper intertidal species. Because the U.S. Coast Guard no longer requires the use of these rocks and small islands for navigation purposes, local stakeholders propose to have the withdrawal removed and the rocks and islands incorporated into the California Coastal National Monument.

### **H.R. 4233**

H.R. 4233 would incorporate the Orange County Rocks and Islands into the California Coastal National Monument and remove the unused lighthouse reservation. The bill would also require that the Secretary of the Interior allow for the continuation of any existing authorized economic and recreational uses on the rocks and islands.

The BLM supports the incorporation of the Orange County Rocks and Islands into the California Coastal National Monument and the removal of the lighthouse reservation. At this time, we are not aware of any currently authorized uses that would be impacted by inclusion of this area into the Monument. We believe that the new language regarding the continuation of existing economic and recreational uses sets a bad precedent and could limit the agency's ability to conserve, protect, and restore the resources and values for which the Monument was designated. We are concerned that this language could unintentionally prevent future management changes that may be needed. The BLM recognizes the importance of economic and recreational opportunities on public lands and will continue to foster good working relationships with interested stakeholders as an essential management component of the Monument.

Each National Monument and National Conservation Area designated by Congress and managed by the BLM is unique. However, all of these designations have certain critical elements in common, including withdrawal from the public land, mining, and mineral leasing laws; limiting off-highway vehicles to roads and trails designated for their use; and language that charges the Secretary of the Interior with allowing only those uses that further the purposes for which the area is established. Based on consistent public support and careful consideration of the area's resource values, the BLM believes that the significance of the scenic, conservation, and recreation values of the Orange County Rocks and Islands merits their inclusion in the National Conservation Lands. As we have previously testified, the BLM believes that these rocks and islands could be managed under the key principles of the National Conservation Lands in a way that protects the area's significant resources and allows for economic and recreational use.

We would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee on language ensuring that, if H.R. 4233 is approved, the BLM would be able to manage the Orange County Rocks and Islands in a manner consistent with the rest of the Monument, as designated.

### **Conclusion**

The Department of the Interior appreciates Representative Rohrabacher's work with local communities to develop this legislation. We support the conservation goals of the bill and look forward to working with the sponsor, the Subcommittee, and stakeholders to address the specific concerns noted in our testimony and to accomplish our shared stewardship goals for conserving, protecting, and restoring the unique resources of the California coastline. I would be happy to answer your questions.