



November 4, 2021

William J. Douros
Regional Director
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration
99 Pacific Street, Bldg 100, Suite F
Monterey, CA

Dear Mr. Douros:

Thank you for inviting St. George to comment on the five-year review of its nomination to create the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. In a follow-up communication, we will comment on the national significance criteria and management considerations. I will share with you here our perspective on the nomination.

The City of St. George would like to express its strong, unequivocal support for the sanctuary nomination. As community members who rely on the marine environment for our food security, livelihoods and spiritual wellbeing, we are witnesses to the continued, accelerated decline of our precious resources. We see it in sea birds who summer in St. George but no longer nest and lay eggs. We see it in the rookeries of our Northern fur seals, whose populations are greatly diminished. We see it in our subsistence fishing, which has become dramatically more challenging for our community members as populations of critically important species such as crab, halibut, salmon and walleye pollock appear to be thinning. The downward spiral of our marine environment troubles our community deeply and forces us to wonder what the future will bring if action is not taken.

We urge NOAA to renew our nomination. More importantly, we urge NOAA in the strongest possible terms to advance our nomination toward designation as expeditiously as possible. For the St. George ecosystem and our Unangan community, the comprehensive management of the marine environment we depend on is an existential imperative – without bold action in the face of advancing threats, the survival of one of the world's most significant natural treasures will be in grave jeopardy and our survival as a community along with it.

We do not embrace a pessimistic vision of the future, however. Instead, we see the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary as the leading edge of a bright horizon for our environment, our culture, our families and what we hope will be many generations of St. George residents to come. In an effort to define a pathway to economic growth, St. George

undertook an economic development planning process, which resulted in the 2020 publication of the [St. George Local Economic Development Strategy](#) and nine accompanying working papers. The process engaged over 80 percent of St. George households and nearly two dozen off-island stakeholders. A community survey found strong support for the protection of our marine environment, the creation of local jobs, infrastructure, fishing, ecotourism and economic growth. Designation of the sanctuary was identified as a key driver that could lead to the realization of this vision for the future.

We know that we must protect our imperiled environment. We know that we must learn more about what is happening around us through increased research and education. We know that we must develop sustainable commercial activities, increase tourism and create jobs. Unlike any other opportunity, designation of the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary will bring all of these goals within reach and help to work together toward a secure future for our Unangan community.

Throughout history, the Unangan people of St. George have endured tremendous challenges. We continue to do so. Through it all, the seals, sea lions, the birds, the fishes and the other magnificent life around St. George has sustained us. With the submission of the sanctuary nomination, our community took action – we stepped forward to save our heritage and claim a better future. We are asking the United States Government to hear this call. We are urging NOAA to designate the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Prokopiaf" followed by "FOR - MLP". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Laurence Prokopiaf
Mayor