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CLEARWATER PORT THREATENS MARINE LIFE IN THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL

*A fact sheet prepared by the Environmental Defense Center
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Information presented in the application from Texas-based NorthernStar Natural Gas for the Clearwater LNG terminal portends an array of deleterious effects on the marine environment of the Santa Barbara Channel and Channel Islands. It also leaves several major questions unanswered about how LNG importation to the terminal will impact the Channel's marine wildlife.

The ecosystem of the Northern Channel Islands, considered "the Galapagos of California" due to its globally unique biodiversity, has received several protective state and federal designations in recognition of these invaluable natural assets. Platform Grace, the proposed location of the NorthernStar terminal, is sited just beyond the boundaries of these areas, putting it beyond reach of the associated environmental protections these designations afford. This is unfortunate, because NorthernStar's Application explicitly admits that the project could have numerous significant impacts to the marine environment and the wildlife of the Santa Barbara Channel, including:

- Subsea construction activities that result in the resuspension of harmful sediments and toxic water pollutants in the shell mounds that resulted from oil production operations (Clearwater Port application, p.7.5-44);
- Destruction of existing hardbottom habitat, including seabed rock formations and corals essential for rock fishes and other wildlife, during gas pipeline construction activities (*Id.*, p.7.5-51);
- Significant impacts to whales, dolphins and fishes from high intensity pile driving noise during construction of the floating dock facility, including habitat abandonment, harassment resulting in alteration of critical behaviors, and direct physical harm to auditory structures and sensitive organs (*Id.*, p.7.5-48);
- Long term effects to habitats and marine biota in the event of a spill of fuel oil from LNG carrier ships or facility service vessels (*Id.*, p.7.5-61).

Beyond these identified impacts, NorthernStar fails to discuss or even acknowledge the potential for the project's LNG tanker traffic (2-3 ships per week) to harm the Channel region's whale populations as a result of shipstrike. This is odd for several reasons: a) the serious concern voiced by both state and federal resource agencies (i.e. the California Coastal Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) that LNG tanker traffic is

likely to result in significant harm to endangered whale species, b) the fact that the Santa Barbara Channel is generally understood as a global hot spot for whales, including the densest seasonal aggregations of blue whales anywhere on Earth, and c) the fact that west coast whale experts consider ship strike perhaps the foremost threat to the long term recovery of the region's great whales, including sperm, blue and fin whales.

In addition to collisions with whales, the terminal's LNG tankers will also produce significant underwater noise emissions, a form of pollution of the marine environment known to impact many species of marine mammals and fish. Documented effects from shipping noise include:

- Masking of ecologically critical sounds relied upon for navigation, finding food, avoiding predators and finding mates;
- temporary and permanent threshold shift (hearing loss) in both marine mammals and fishes;
- avoidance of important and historical habitat;
- numerous indirect or synergetic effects that result from these impacts.

Unfortunately, even though NorthernStar's application acknowledges that LNG tanker noise can result in an array of behavioral and physical effects on marine wildlife, it then argues that because their tanker traffic will represent only a proportion of the area's existing vessel traffic, the corporation has no responsibility to study or address the chronic noise pollution their LNG tankers will cause. (*Id.*, p.7.5-60). This argument for absolution of responsibility is first and foremost an affront to the public, the scientists, government marine resource managers, and non-governmental organizations that have worked for decades to protect and restore the whale populations devastated by industrial whaling. Second, it represents a false logic that, if applied to other forms of pollution, would extinguish any hope for restoring the global environment.

Santa Barbara Channel wildlife and habitats already face tremendous environmental pressures from human activities. The great whales and many fish species are still struggling to recover after decades of human overexploitation, while the growing human coastal human population is producing ever greater levels of pollution that threatens to alter the ocean's fundamental chemistry. Our region's communities must require full disclosure and analysis of the complete range of implications from NorthernStar's LNG proposal, before granting this out-of-state corporation a long term contract to import overseas fossil fuels into Southern California.