March 3, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

Our organizations write to thank you for your leadership in convening the upcoming Climate Summit on Earth Day, and to urge you to ensure that the Summit includes discussions focused on the ocean.

The value of U.S. leadership to address the climate crisis cannot be underestimated, as reflected by the renewed energy in global climate discourse since your Administration rejoined the Paris Agreement. We urge that the Summit address ocean-related actions that can be taken this year to both mitigate climate change and bolster the climate resilience of the ocean. These actions include adoption of a new international target to protect and conserve at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030 from harmful industrial or non-industrial activities, and finalization of an international high seas treaty to strengthen management and conservation of the ocean in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The science is clear that the ocean plays a key role in regulating the climate. The ocean has absorbed more than 90% of the excess heat and one-quarter of the carbon dioxide humans (CO₂) have generated by burning fossil fuels, helping to shield the planet from the worst ravages of climate change.

But this has come at a cost we are only now beginning to understand. Climate change is exerting serious, long-term and far-reaching negative consequences for our ocean. The ocean is now warmer than at any time since measurements began, more acidic than at any time in the last 14 million years, and is losing oxygen, fundamental to virtually all marine life. These
changes are already affecting different elements of the marine food web, from the smallest plankton to important fisheries to the largest whales.

Fortunately, there are actions we can take that can help bolster the resilience of the ocean and its ability to mitigate climate change. These include protecting “blue carbon” ecosystems (salt marsh, mangroves and seagrass) that sequester carbon, reducing CO2 emissions from shipping, halting new offshore drilling and harnessing clean offshore wind energy. In addition to action at the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties, two major opportunities to bolster the ocean’s climate resilience are slated to take place this year – the adoption of new global biodiversity targets at the upcoming meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (currently scheduled for November), and the scheduled final session of negotiations to develop an international treaty that will ensure effective mechanisms for protecting biodiversity in the ocean in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

We believe the Climate Summit presents a key opportunity to focus global attention on the ocean-climate nexus and the actions needed in 2021 to maximize both the climate-mitigation capacity of the ocean and its climate resilience. We urge you to ensure the U.S. is prepared with specific commitments to advance both goals.

We stand ready to help organize an ocean segment of the Summit and to help bring world leaders to the table with concrete commitments around this topic.

Again, we congratulate you and thank you for your extraordinary vision and leadership on climate. We look forward to supporting you in whatever way we can.

Conservation International       National Audubon Society
Earthjustice                   Natural Resources Defense Council
Greenpeace USA               Oceana
High Seas Alliance          Ocean Defense Initiative
League of Conservation Voters    Ocean Conservancy
Marine Conservation Institute  Ocean Unite
Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey Center for the Blue Economy Sierrra Club
Wildlife Conservation Society