



VIRGINIA
AQUARIUM
& MARINE SCIENCE CENTER

August 18, 2015

The Honorable Mayor William Sessoms
and Members of City Council
Municipal Center, Building 1
2401 Courthouse Drive
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456

Dear Mayor Sessoms and City Council:

We understand that you will be receiving a briefing today at your meeting on off-shore energy. The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation wishes to inform you that we intend to nominate the Norfolk Canyon, a submarine canyon with deep sea coral, spectacular marine life, and rare geologic features, as a National Marine Sanctuary. The canyon is located on the edge of the continental shelf, 60 miles offshore, and within the area potentially slated for energy development. We are in the beginning stages of the national nomination process and ultimately plan to come to you for a letter of support for our nomination package to be submitted to NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries in Silver Spring, MD.

At this stage, we do not know if any potential offshore development would impact the Norfolk Canyon, and thus be inconsistent with a sanctuary plan. Our initial research has revealed that the Norfolk Canyon is indeed a special place, and recent protections have been placed on it. For example, the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council recently voted to prohibit bottom contacting fishing gear in Norfolk Canyon and all other Atlantic coast submarine canyons to provide protections for ancient deep sea coral communities. This precedent-setting decision underscores the value of submarine canyons, such as Norfolk Canyon, and follows recognition by the scientific community and management groups like the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean that conservation of these ocean areas should be our highest priority.

We would appreciate it if you would take this information under advisement as you are briefed today and move forward with any decision-making processes that could impact this immeasurably valuable natural resource.

Sincerely,

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President

Enclosures (2)

Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation
717 General Booth Boulevard, Suite 1, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23451
(757) 385-7777 phone (757) 437-4976 fax