

Garry Mauro  
Commissioner  
General Land Office



October 12, 1987

Dear Gulf Coast Neighbor:

We from Gulf Coast states are blessed with thousands of miles of beaches that play major roles in recreation, tourism and the habitat so crucial to aquatic wildlife. But the general condition of our beaches is shameful. More garbage can be found on those beaches than in some cities.

Unfortunately, the problem is not entirely or even primarily of our own making. Because of the prevailing currents in the Gulf of Mexico, garbage dumped anywhere in the Gulf has an excellent chance of ending up on a beach. In addition, a House subcommittee report has estimated that one million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals are killed annually by choking on this floating junk. According to a 1985 Texas Coastal and Marine Council Report, an estimated 75% to 90% of the trash on Texas beaches comes from offshore sources such as international shipping, fishing vessels and offshore oil and gas platforms. The states are working hard to do their share to keep our beaches clean. However, it has become clear that beach garbage is not just a state problem, but a coastwide problem and an international problem as well.

As I am sure you are aware, the U.S. Senate is currently considering the ratification of a treaty known as Annex V of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). This treaty basically does four things: (1) it prohibits the ocean disposal of all plastics, (2) it prohibits the disposal of other floating garbage closer than 25 miles to the nearest coastline, (3) it requires that reception facilities for ship garbage be provided at all ports and (4) it designates certain "special areas" where no garbage dumping from ships is allowed. The presently designated "special areas" are the Mediterranean, Red, Black, and Baltic Seas and the Persian/Oman Gulfs, all shallow closed basins with heavy shipping traffic. The Gulf of Mexico which shares those same characteristics, is not currently designated as a "special area".

The Texas General Land Office, which I head, commissioned the Center for Environmental Education to conduct a study that would substantiate a request that the Gulf of Mexico be declared a "special area". This study was submitted to Rear Admiral J. William Kime of the U.S. Coast Guard on August 31, 1987. Admiral Kime heads the U.S. delegation to the International Maritime

Stephen F. Austin Building  
1700 North Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78701  
(512) 463-5256

Gulf Coast Neighbor

October 12, 1987

Page 2

Organization (IMO) which is slated to formally consider this special area designation request at its annual meeting to be held in London November 30-December 4.

The Coast Guard has scheduled a public meeting for 1:30 p.m., Monday, October 26, 1987, in Room 2415 Coast Guard Headquarters, 2100 2nd Street, S.W., Washington, D. C. 20593, to take public comment regarding the proposal to designate the Gulf of Mexico as a special area. The formal U.S. position regarding the proposal will be determined following this opportunity for public comment.

The proposal received the unanimous support of the Coastal States Organization comprised of the gubernatorially appointed representatives of the thirty-five U.S. coastal states, territories and commonwealths at CSO's May meeting in Seattle. It has also drawn public support from the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Coast Guard, the National Wildlife Federation, the Oceanic Society and the Center for Environmental Education.

The Gulf of Mexico provides an impressive wealth of resources to the United States and to each of our home states, but it also presents comparably great responsibilities. The continued health and productivity of the Gulf must become a national priority. We must not allow the Gulf to become severely polluted, as was the Mediterranean, before taking action to protect its unique and valuable resources.

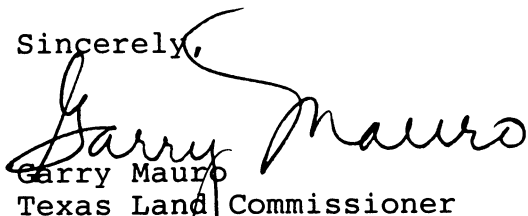
I urge you to join with me in expressing strong support from all five states bordering the Gulf of Mexico for amendment of Annex V to provide special area designation for the Gulf. I hope you will send a letter of support to Admiral Kime and Secretary Negroponte expressing your support for special area designation and, if possible, that you will attend the October 26 public meeting in Washington. Strong Gulf state support is critical to the success of this effort. Your letter should be addressed to:

Rear Admiral J. William Kime  
Chief, Office of Marine Safety  
Security and Environmental  
Protection  
United States Coast Guard  
2100 2nd Street, S.W.  
Washington, D. C. 20593

Mr. John D. Negroponte  
Assistant Secretary for Oceans  
and International Environmental  
and Scientific Affairs  
COS, Room 7831  
Department of State  
Washington, D. C. 20520

Please feel free to contact me at 512/463-5256 or Tom Henderson of my staff at 512/463-5019. We look forward to working with you to solve this pressing coastal problem. Thank you for your consideration and your help.

Sincerely,

  
Garry Mauro  
Texas Land Commissioner

GM/BTH/rg