



Letter of support for nomination to World Heritage status

Wednesday 17 July, 2019

To Whom It May Concern,

As Mission Blue we are writing to lend our support for the nomination of the coral reefs from Capurgana to Cabo Tiburón and Varadero's coral reef in Colombia to World Heritage status. Both these locations have already achieved the status of Hope Spots under Mission Blue.

Mission Blue inspires action to explore and protect the ocean through our Hope Spots program. Hope Spots are special places that are critical to the ocean — Earth's blue heart. Led by legendary oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle, the Mission Blue Team has launched a global effort to shed light on these vital ecosystems and ignite support to safeguard them as marine protected areas. The vision is to create a global network of marine protected areas that cover 30% of the ocean by 2030 in order to nurse the ocean back to health.

The Coral Reefs between Capurgana and Cabo Tiburon located off the coast of Capurgana are home to an exquisite abundance of marine life including healthy coral reefs that provide a feeding ground to several species including lobsters, snappers, rays and octopi. The beaches beyond the reefs are home to one of the world's main nesting sites for the IUCN red-listed leatherback sea turtle, with populations slowly recovering after a ban on industrial fisheries in the area. Varadero's Coral Reef off the coast of Colombia has what many consider to be a paradoxical existence, harboring high coral cover and rich biodiversity despite having poor water quality and sediments discharged during the last 500 years by the Canal del Dique, a 118 square kilometer canal connecting Cartagena Bay to the Magdalena River.

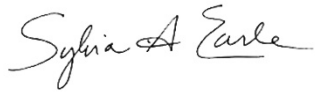
Affording these areas World Heritage status would help protect these amazing wildlife sites from current and future threats. For Capurgana and Cabo Tiburon threats of oil drilling have haunted the nearby marine areas, and there is mounting pressure from the cruise ship industry to establish a terminal in the area. However, organizations like the Foundation ICRI Colombia have been hard at work conducting citizen science programs to collect data on the recovering marine life populations and to spread awareness on the need to expand an already-established protected area to include this Hope Spot within its jurisdiction.

The persistence of Varadero's Reef is currently threatened by a project to modernize Cartagena's port, not only by the direct damage produced by the dredging of a new shipping lane through the reef, but also by the deterioration of water conditions associated with the operation and maintenance of the channel.

The local scientific community has been studying these reefs, and recent international attention brings conservationists hope that action can be taken to protect what is perhaps the only surviving ecosystem in the now-polluted Bay of Cartagena.

We hope very much that you will consider these areas worthy of greater protection and recognition under the World Heritage Convention

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sylvia A Earle". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Dr. Sylvia Earle
President
Mission Blue