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Santa Barbara Channelkeeper Takes on Review of Controversial NorthernStar Liquefied Natural Gas Terminal

Hires the Environmental Defense Center to Coordinate Rigorous Review of the Project's Impacts

(October 22nd, Santa Barbara, CA) **Santa Barbara Channelkeeper** announced today that they have hired the **Environmental Defense Center** to conduct legal and scientific review of a new offshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal proposed for the Santa Barbara Channel.

Channelkeeper Executive Director Kira Redmond explained, "The mission of Santa Barbara Channelkeeper is to protect the long term health and viability of the Channel." Redmond continued, "We view the placement of an LNG terminal in the Channel to be a significant and potentially devastating development for the Channel's long term future. As such, it is our responsibility to the communities we serve to inform them of this project, to ensure that the project meets all applicable environmental laws and to demand that safer alternatives with fewer impacts are carefully considered." The first approvals for the project could come as early as June 2008.

"The Environmental Defense Center's comprehensive legal and scientific analysis of the recently defeated Cabrillo Port LNG terminal showed just how dangerous and polluting these projects can be. Given EDC's unparalleled background on oil and gas issues in California, we're pleased to have them on our team to ensure a rigorous evaluation of this new proposal," said Redmond.

According to the US Coast Guard and the California State Lands Commission, the lead permitting agencies reviewing the project, Houston-based NorthernStar Natural Gas, Inc. is proposing to convert an aging offshore oil and gas production facility, Platform Grace, into a terminal to receive and reprocess shipments of natural gas produced and liquefied overseas. According to the agencies, the LNG will be delivered by approximately 139 supertanker arrivals per year, yielding gas "send-out" of up to 1.4 billion cubic feet per day of natural gas.

In addition to converting Platform Grace, over the proposed three-year construction process, NorthernStar proposes to build:

- “floating docks” to provide berths for two 1,000-foot LNG supertankers at a time,
- a subsea LNG pipeline to connect the ships to Platform Grace,
- a new high pressure subsea natural gas pipeline running from Platform Grace across the Santa Barbara Channel to Mandalay Generating Station near Oxnard, and
- approximately 63 miles of new high pressure gas pipeline across Ventura County, from Oxnard to Santa Clarita.

Linda Krop, chief counsel of the Environmental Defense Center (EDC), summarized the array of potential environmental impacts.

“An offshore project of this magnitude could affect nearly every facet of the region’s on- and offshore environments. LNG tanker traffic could be a major source of harmful onshore air pollution and underwater noise pollution. Construction activities like subsea pile-driving and pipeline installation could harm marine mammals and fish, and disturb toxic debris leftover from oil production activities. Marine wildlife and boaters could be severely jeopardized by LNG or oil spills, a major concern given the untested nature of much of the proposal’s components, and mainland watersheds could be polluted from construction of the onshore pipeline.”

In formal comments submitted last Thursday to the permitting agencies on behalf of Channelkeeper regarding the scope of the project's environmental review, EDC also raised concerns regarding the potential for project tanker traffic to strike and harm or kill marine mammals like the three blue whales struck and killed by ships in September of this year. Referring to the increased likelihood of whale collisions posed by the tanker traffic, and the laws that prohibit such takes of the animals, the letter stated that the permitting agencies “must assess and mitigate the potential for LNG tanker collisions with large whales *throughout the entire transoceanic route* that the vessels are to travel to deliver LNG to the proposed facility.”

Krop and Redmond also explained that, given the suite of potentially significant environmental impacts, the project’s proximity to the Channel Islands National Park and National Marine Sanctuary is of particular concern. “Platform Grace is about 3 miles from the Channel Islands Sanctuary, which is world renowned for its biodiversity” said Redmond. In addition, the LNG tankers will pass through Sanctuary waters. “Year-round LNG processing and tanker traffic could not only threaten this natural treasure, but profoundly alter the character of the Channel for all who enjoy it.”

According to Krop, EDC and Channelkeeper also share grave concerns regarding the larger scale effects associated with the project. Independent research contracted by EDC in 2006 indicated that the Cabrillo Port LNG project would have produced nearly 25 million tons of greenhouse gases per year from drilling to consumption of the delivered natural gas— nearly 5% of California’s statewide greenhouse gas emissions in 1990.

“NorthernStar’s proposal could be a major step back for California in its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prevent global warming,” said Krop. AB 32 (the “Global Warming Solutions Act”), promulgated in 2006, requires California to reduce statewide greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, equivalent to an approximately 25% reduction of current emissions levels.

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper (www.sbck.org) is a non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds, and is an affiliate of the international Waterkeeper Alliance and the California Coastkeeper Alliance. The Santa Barbara-based Environmental Defense Center (www.edcnet.org) is a non-profit, public interest law firm that has worked for the last 30 years to protect and restore the environment and natural resources of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties.

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