December 9, 2014

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Re: Open Letter Concerning Action on Ocean Acidification

Dear Governor Inslee,

Thank you for your important leadership on ocean acidification. As you know, it's an issue that's critical to the health of coastal communities in Washington and along the West Coast and deserves action. Unfortunately the Washington Department of Ecology has publicly stated there's insufficient evidence that ocean acidification is harming Washington's aquatic life. These statements have confused the public and impeded action needed to address ocean acidification. We ask that you set the record straight and start within your own Cabinet.

The science of ocean acidification is clear. There are immutable facts of ocean acidification in the Pacific Northwest that cannot be denied:

1. Carbon dioxide pollution changes ocean chemistry, which impairs the ability of organisms to build their protective shells and skeletons;
2. Anthropogenic CO_2 emissions are detectable, add to the low-pH conditions from coastal upwelling, and have increased the occurrence of conditions that are harmful to shell-building animals off the coast of Washington;
3. Ocean acidification has already pushed seawater chemistry beyond important biological thresholds for some shellfish in the Pacific Northwest; and
4. Ocean acidification has been linked to massive oyster larvae mortality in Pacific Northwest shellfish hatcheries.

In sum, there is sufficient science that ocean acidification poses a significant threat to wildlife, fisheries and coastal economies in the Pacific Northwest. There is a robust and well-established body of science documenting that ocean acidification can harm marine life and that it poses a real water-quality problem. We also know how to fix that problem, starting with limiting the amount of CO_2 pollution that enters our oceans.

The Department of Ecology has a responsibility to the public to take ocean acidification seriously and to take steps to address it. Instead, the agency has rejected the science, saying ocean acidification is not impairing coastal waters. The agency has apparently made these statements to avoid having to take steps necessary under the Clean Water Act to protect our ocean and wildlife. (In court documents, the agency noted that its finding on ocean acidification

“appropriately avoids the necessary next step after listing of determining a total maximum daily load for pollutants in affected waters.”)

The scientific evidence for ocean acidification in the Pacific Northwest is clear and compelling, and it’s deeply troubling to see the Department of Ecology deny that reality. We are writing to urge you to bring the Department of Ecology along with you in your bold leadership on climate change and ocean acidification. Washington can and should be a leader on this critical issue. To prevent the worst consequences of ocean acidification and to promote healthy oceans and coastal economies, the time to act is now.

Sincerely,

Blue Climate Solutions
Blue Frontier
Center for Biological Diversity
Christians Caring for Creation
Clean Ocean Action
Friends of the Earth
Greenpeace USA
Institute for Fisheries Resources
Ocean Conservation Research
Orca Conservancy
Orca Network
Orca Relief Citizens' Alliance
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations
The Safina Center
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Whale and Dolphin Conservation
WILDCOAST
WildEarth Guardians