

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0548

October 14, 2021

Richard W. Spinrad, Ph. D.
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Admiral Karl Schultz
Commandant of the Coast Guard
United States Coast Guard
US Coast Guard Stop 7318
2703 Martin Luther King JR Ave SE
Washington, DC 20593-7318

Dear Mr. Spinrad and Admiral Schultz:

I write today in response to the major oil spill that occurred off the coast of Huntington Beach on October 2, 2021. The catastrophic spill has coated local wildlife habitats, harmed human health, and shut down popular beaches. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has played an integral part in the slick identification of the oil spill. I commend the NOAA for sharing satellite imagery with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) in determining the location of the sheen.

News reports continue to provide compelling evidence that the largest oil spill in the region in three decades may have occurred due to an anchor or chain of a vessel pulling the pipeline “like a bow string.” The USCG has designated this as a Major Marine Casualty and is investigating with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to determine the facts.

As a member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure’s Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials **I am asking NOAA and the USCG to immediately re-examine and survey the nautical charts near all the pipelines linked to offshore oil platforms off the coast of Orange County.** If maps do not match with existing pipelines, or new reports that show a pipe could have been moved months ago, this will continue to lead to many concerning and major human and wildlife safety issues. Any moment wasted is a moment too long.

With this in mind, we are aware that the Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Los Angeles-Long Beach (LA/LB) is jointly operated by the Marine Exchange of Southern California and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). NOAA and the USCG partner in a variety of matters to keep our nation’s coasts and waterways safe for maritime commerce, recreational activities, and wildlife. I request that you answer the following questions in an expedited manner:

- When was the last time NOAA surveyed the pipeline locations off the coast of Orange County?
- How often does NOAA survey the pipeline locations off the coast of Orange County?
- Currently, are the pipeline locations off the Coast of Orange County accurate?
- Can you confirm that NOAA has provided accurate maps to vessels waiting to get into the Port of Los Angeles and the Port of Long Beach?

I thank everyone who is working around the clock and will continue to assist any way possible to help the citizens of Southern California. Your accountability to this emergency mapping issue needs immediate attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Steel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michelle" and the last name "Steel" clearly distinguishable.

Michelle Steel
Member of Congress