

Written Testimony of
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Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3764, the “*Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act of 2021*”

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Thank you to Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, and Committee staff for the opportunity to testify on the *Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act of 2021*. My name is Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Azul, an initiative legally organized under Multiplier founded in 2011 that works with the Latinx community to bring its voice to conversations about marine resources. As someone who began their career in the commercial fishing and aquaculture industries, I understand first-hand the importance of a thriving ocean for communities across the country. Now more than ever, the existential threat of climate change requires policymakers to take innovative, bold leadership in conserving marine resources while centering equity at the heart of these solutions.

Since 2011, Azul’s work has centered around celebrating Latinx’s rich conservation traditions and connecting them to current solutions. The ocean is important to Latinx communities both culturally and as a means of economic sustainability. Unfortunately – climate change not only threatens marine resources – it disproportionately impacts communities of color. As climate change accelerates, environmental injustice will continue to worsen unless action is taken. Communities of color are especially vulnerable because they live in places that will confront severe repercussions due to climate change: a majority of the Latinx community in the United States live in California, Texas, Florida, and New York, all states considered to be most at risk of excessive flooding, air pollution, and heat waves.¹ Despite 40 percent of the U.S. population living in densely populated coastal areas, Latinxs living in coastal communities will bear the brunt of these impacts because, in many places, they overwhelmingly reside in flood-prone neighborhoods.² This example of environmental injustice must be addressed.

¹ <https://www.nrdc.org/media/2016/161013>

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<https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/population.html#:~:text=As%20of%202014%2C%20nearly%2040,people%20live%20in%20coastal%20counties;>
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/28/climate-change-environmental-racism-america>

Starting today, members of the Committee and the House can take action: the *Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act of 2021* proposes to advance ocean climate action while centering equity and justice each step of the way. To this day, environmental justice has never been prioritized by an administration like it has by the Biden Administration in its proposals to address the climate crisis. Chairman Grijalva, Congressman McEachin, and others are leading the way on environmental justice in Congress, Mr. Chairman, with the introduction of H.R. 2021, the *Environmental Justice for All Act* and now the *Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act*. Azul is pleased to highlight elements of the *Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act* that address inequality at its core. Provisions of the bill that address inequality include 1) reducing greenhouse gas emissions; 2) supporting the Biden Administration's goal of equitably conserving 30 percent each of land and water by 2030 (30x30); 3) assessing barriers faced by communities of color when accessing nature; 4) enhancing the ocean's natural ability to store carbon and protect coastal communities; and 5) increasing the resilience of ocean and coastal ecosystems.

Reducing GHG Emissions

In order to keep global temperatures from increasing past the 1.5 C target of the Paris Agreement, the most important thing we can all do for the ocean is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This bill would advance that goal in several ways. First, by prohibiting the expansion of offshore oil exploration and drilling in most areas of the Outer Continental Shelf except the Western and Central Gulf of Mexico. While we applaud the Committee's efforts to prohibit exploration and drilling in certain areas, Azul strongly advocates for a complete prohibition of oil and gas exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf. Communities of color living along the coast are devastated by accidents involving offshore oil and gas. Moreover, expanding offshore oil drilling by any amount will intensify climate change and threaten ocean and coastal habitats that are important to healthy fish, marine wildlife, and coastal economies.

As a first step toward recognizing the negative impact plastic production has on our environment and frontline communities, Azul is also supportive of the bill's goal to fund broader ocean climate action through a 5-cent excise tax on single use plastic production.

We are also supportive of the provisions in the bill to encourage the transition to renewable energy sources, including well-planned and sited offshore renewables like wind and tidal energy, and Azul supports the bill's aim to promote decreases in shipping emissions.

Supporting the Biden Administration's Goal of 30x30

We appreciate the provisions in the bill that support the Biden Administration's goal to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030 including the authorization of a Marine Protected Areas inventory and a marine biodiversity census and gap analysis that will help ensure accountability in the progress towards achieving 30x30.

Assessing Barriers Faced by Communities of Color When Accessing Nature

Azul is especially supportive of a provision authorizing a study by the National Academies to assess public access to the nation's coasts, including the Great Lakes. This study must include a state-by-state analysis of the quality and quantity of existing public access points, opportunities and barriers to access for low-income communities, communities of color, Tribal and Indigenous communities, and rural communities, the impacts of sea-level rise and extreme weather, and strategies to prevent the loss of public access. Over the last year, Americans from across the country turned to neighborhood parks, trails, and beaches for respite and healing more than ever before. The COVID-19 pandemic proved access to nature is not a privilege: it's a necessity for our health and wellbeing. Azul is supportive of these provisions enabling more equitable access to nature.

Enhancing the Ocean's Natural Ability to Store Carbon and Protect Coastal Communities

The *Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act* includes provisions to restore and protect coastal blue carbon ecosystems, including mangroves, salt marshes, sea grasses, coral reefs, and kelp forests. These coastal ecosystems absorb carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and safely store it at a rate of up to four times that of forests on land. Additionally, the bill will limit the impacts of coastal erosion, flooding, and storms, while providing habitat for marine wildlife and fisheries by protecting and restoring blue carbon ecosystems. In addition to these natural benefits, coastal communities of color will benefit substantially from enhanced flooding protections. We strongly support these measures in the legislation. Azul would like to also thank Congressman Huffman for his *Blue Carbon Protection Act*, which establishes a blue carbon program to conserve and restore marine and coastal blue carbon ecosystems.

Increasing the Resilience of Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems

By decreasing the amount of stress placed on the ocean, healthy ocean systems are better able to adapt to the effects of climate change. I believe sustainably managing the ocean must be the standard moving forward if we want to continue enjoying the bounty marine resources provide.

Climate change can greatly impact commercial fisheries and the communities that depend on them.³ This is something I witnessed during my time in the seafood industry: in the winter of 2006, a *Pseudo-nitzschia* bloom resulted in a large mortality event that affected bluefin tuna as a result of domoic acid poisoning, an event explained by ocean warming leading to harmful algal blooms.⁴ A healthy ocean leads to healthy fisheries and maintaining and strengthening fisheries management systems, to support rebuilding and ensuring a sustainable supply of wild caught fish, achieves the goal of supporting healthy fisheries. We support the provisions in the bill directed at this goal.

³ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2018/12/04/671996313/fishermen-sue-big-oil-for-its-role-in-climate-change>

⁴ https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/378/docs/Caron_pdfs/2018_Smith_etal_HA.pdf

The time to act on climate change is long overdue; the *Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act of 2021* will capitalize on the opportunities the ocean offers to combat climate change, and this bill is the kind of leadership from Congress we need to confront the environmental injustices that Azul and others have been working to correct for many, many years. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership on this bill and to you and Congressman McEachin for your efforts to advance environmental justice more broadly. We look forward to working with you to advance these important proposals and goals.