

Imila-alpa Commitments

The second Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange was held in Monterey and Seaside, California (April 2024). The Exchange brought together Indigenous governments and organizations with existing or emergent relationships with NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS), designated or nominated national marine sanctuaries, and marine national monuments across the Pacific and Maryland. The Exchange facilitated discussions on shared interests among Indigenous partners, hosted a cultural exchange, and facilitated ongoing conversations on appropriate and meaningful mechanisms for NOAA's continued Indigenous engagement across the National Marine Sanctuary System.

Building upon the first Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange hosted by the Makah Tribe in Neah Bay, Washington (September 2022), and in response to the requests of Indigenous Participants, ONMS leadership is adding to the eight Neah Bay Commitments for a total of **15** commitments. The 15 commitments, called the Imila-alpa¹ Commitments, will be reflected through long-term and ongoing work and actions. The commitments demonstrate ONMS' dedication to strengthening partnerships with Indigenous governments, organizations, and communities and ensuring that ONMS' intentions align with its actions.



Participants attending the second Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange. Image provided by Chad King, 2024. The image should not be duplicated or used in any way.

¹Imila-alpa, are Esselen words and translate in English to mean Ocean Words. These words honor our collective commitments to the ocean from the second Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange.

ONMS is grateful to the Esselen and Rumsen Homeland Peoples for welcoming us to Seaside and Monterey, and we are grateful to all the Indigenous Peoples and governments who continue to care for the lands and waters we passed through during our time together for the second Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange.



Monterey Bay, California. Photo: NOAA

This document provides the Imila-alpa Commitments, followed by the original collective request made by the Indigenous Participants at the second Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange, and finally the Neah Bay Commitments.

The original language from the Neah Bay Commitments is highlighted in the below Imila-alpa Commitments. The original Neah Bay Commitments can be viewed on page 7.

Imila-alpa Commitments

Commitment 1: Convene another Indigenous Partner/ONMS cultural exchange.

This commitment includes, but is not limited to:

- welcoming a national focus and representation;
- requesting to have representation from the Department of Commerce;
- hosting a one-day, in-person Indigenous caucus meeting in preparation for a national scale exchange; and
- exploring the facilitation of a regionally focused exchange amongst Indigenous Peoples and ONMS within the Pacific Islands Region.

Commitment 2: Establish internal ONMS principles and standard operating procedures for Tribal/Indigenous engagement with broad guidance and flexibility to adapt to various regions and situations.

Commitment 3: Continue to explore collaborative management as a continuum of approaches with flexibility and adaptation over space and time.

Commitment 4: Include references to our shared values and approaches to collaborative management in sanctuary management plans to institutionalize these efforts.

Commitment 5: Advocate internally for strengthening Tribal/Indigenous roles within our founding legislation, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA), and other possible legislation, including by referencing key principles (e.g., relevant articles) of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and language from relevant Executive Orders and policies (e.g., White House Guidance on Indigenous Knowledge, E.O. 13175).

Commitment 6: Continue to increase capacity within ONMS for Tribal and Indigenous engagement, for example, by establishing additional ONMS cultural resources coordinator positions and exploring pathways to diversify ONMS' senior leadership, including ways to hire more Indigenous Peoples.

Commitment 7: Strengthen internal NOAA coordination, especially with NOAA Fisheries, on Tribal and Indigenous relationships.

Commitment 8: Continue to support and, where possible, expand the inclusion of Indigenous approaches to conservation, including cultural and language conservation and revitalization (e.g., supporting cultural activities, access, inclusion of Indigenous worldviews in sanctuary processes, inclusion of Indigenous languages in outreach, place names). This commitment includes, but is not limited to:

- supporting greater Indigenous community access to sanctuary sites (their homeland waters) with more vessel field trips; and
- increasing the use of Indigenous languages on sanctuary signs, exhibits, and other materials based on appropriate partnership arrangements with respective Indigenous governments and communities.

Commitment 9: Enhance continuous and consistent communication and engagement with Indigenous governments and organizations whose homelands align with National Marine Sanctuary System sites. This commitment includes, but is not limited to, communications and equitable engagement in:

- sharing and seeking out education, internship, and funding opportunities;
- updating communication materials to indicate that ONMS works with Indigenous Peoples (rights holders);
- communicating how ONMS works with other offices within NOAA; and
- providing clear communication of the legal processes associated with ONMS actions and approval processes.

Commitment 10: Enhance involvement and collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations whose homelands align with National Marine Sanctuary System sites. This commitment includes, but is not limited to:

- developing management plans (e.g., Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries will work with Indigenous governments on revisions to the sites' management plan);
- research and monitoring activities; and
- resource protection initiatives.

Commitment 11: Work to support Indigenous data sovereignty and intellectual property rights. This commitment includes, but is not limited to:

- working to implement free, prior, and informed consent, ensuring Indigenous Peoples' awareness and consent of any sharing of information that they have provided, to the extent possible under U.S. regulations and policies;
- working to address challenges associated with the Freedom of Information Act (e.g., protecting sensitive information);
- establishing policies to support Indigenous data sovereignty and utilization of data agreements (e.g., develop data agreement templates);
- working with Indigenous governments and organizations to access data that is generated within the National Marine Sanctuary System and ensure that data is in usable formats; and
- raising ONMS awareness and capacity to support Indigenous intellectual property rights.

Commitment 12: Encourage NOAA General Counsel representation at ONMS meetings and events, as practicable, to provide information about processes, policies, and procedures and to answer questions.

Commitment 13: Invest in Indigenous communities. This commitment includes, but is not limited to:

- engaging with Indigenous youth, including exploring ways of providing opportunities to connect with the ocean, career pathways, and training; and

- exploring the possibilities of developing Indigenous-specific internships and scholarship opportunities.

Commitment 14: Work with Indigenous governments regarding ways to participate in Sanctuary Advisory Councils and additional advisory groups. This commitment includes, but is not limited to:

- working with the Chumash Community and Chumash governments to restart the Channel Island National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council’s Chumash Community Working Group; and
- working with Indigenous government(s) to further discussions and potential for shared work and toward ensuring equitable representation on the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council.

Commitment 15: Respect Indigenous Knowledge and recognize the need for both Indigenous Knowledge and science for evidence-based decision-making. ONMS will work to implement the White House and NOAA Guidance on working with Indigenous Knowledge into processes and approaches. This commitment includes, but is not limited to:

- building ONMS’ staff understanding of Indigenous Knowledge;
- building ONMS’ staff understanding of bringing together Indigenous Knowledge and science through a co-production of knowledge approach from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples; and
- raising up concerns shared by Indigenous partners to relevant federal government offices (e.g., working with the National Science Technology Council Sub-Committee on Indigenous Knowledge).

Requests made by the Indigenous Caucus at the second Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange

The following 11 requests were collectively made by the Indigenous caucus at the Exchange. The Imila-alpa commitments are made to respond to the 11 requests and the Neah Bay commitments made in 2022.²

The collective Indigenous caucus provided the text below on the final day of the Exchange. The PDF document shared can be viewed [here](#).

1. Amend the National Marine Sanctuary Act to include language from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), the related language from all relevant Executive Orders (Biden's Admin), and Indigenous Knowledge.
2. Data sovereignty confidentiality agreements.
3. Indigenous Caucus requires a day-designated meeting prior to the conference for preparation and cultural immersion, as well as a midpoint.
4. Necessity of a Department of Commerce Representative at National Marine Sanctuary Pacific Exchange.
5. NOAA is responsible for showing us their progress in sanctuary research.
6. Tribal and Indigenous Peoples-specific scholarships and internships for the younger generations of Indigenous Peoples that NOAA wishes to partner with.
7. Respect intellectual property rights.
8. Commitment to generational planning for sustainability within the federal government.
9. Access to legal consultation for Indigenous Peoples during ONMS and NOAA events.
10. Leverage resources to aid our Indigenous rights and issues in our homelands and advocate internally within the government for our Indigenous rights and goals.
11. It is important for Indigenous Peoples to understand the legal process. Request that NOAA attorneys with a strong understanding of the processes be available to explain processes associated with agency actions and who approves policies and laws.

² While sharing request number 10, it was verbally requested that 1) Indigenous Peoples be invited to all NOAA and BOEM meetings. While ONMS can commit to inviting Indigenous governments and organizations to relevant ONMS meetings, we are unable to make this commitment on behalf of all of NOAA or BOEM. And 2) funding to support Indigenous rights advocacy and to hold agencies accountable. While this is not a commitment that ONMS can make, ONMS can share funding and grant opportunities as appropriate.

Neah Bay Commitments

The following eight commitments were made at the 1st Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange hosted by the Makah Tribe in Neah Bay, Washington (September 2022). The Imila-alpa commitments reflect a combination of the Neah Bay commitments and commitments made in response to requests made by the Indigenous caucus and valuable discussions held at the second Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange.

In March 2024, the Office of National Marine Sanctuary released a briefing note to share the Office of National Marine Sanctuary [Actions Related to Commitments Shared at the first Cross-Pacific Indigenous Exchange](#).

Commitment 1: Convene another ONMS/Indigenous Partners Group in 2023, initially keeping a Pacific-wide focus (while considering the addition of other regions for future meetings).

Commitment 2: Establish internal ONMS principles and standard operating procedures for Tribal/Indigenous engagement with broad guidance with flexibility to adapt in a range of regions and situations.

Commitment 3: Continue to explore collaborative management as a continuum of approaches with flexibility and adaptation over space and time.

Commitment 4: Include references to our approach to collaborative management in the sanctuary management plan to institutionalize these efforts.

Commitment 5: Advocate internally for strengthening tribal/Indigenous roles within our founding legislation, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA), and other possible legislation.

Commitment 6: Continue to increase capacity within ONMS for Tribal and Indigenous engagement, for example, by establishing additional ONMS cultural resources coordinator positions.

Commitment 7: Strengthen internal NOAA coordination, especially with NOAA Fisheries, on Tribal and Indigenous relationships.

Commitment 8: Continue to support and, where possible, expand cultural and language conservation and revitalization (e.g., use of Indigenous languages in outreach, place names).