

***LOS ISLEÑOS HERITAGE AND
CULTURAL SOCIETY OF
ST. BERNARD***

**POSITION STATEMENT RELATIVE TO THE
PROPOSED VIOLET CONTAINER YARD IN ST.
BERNARD PARISH**

**APPLICANT: Board of Commissioners of the Port
of New Orleans**

Permit Application Number MVN-2020-00270-EG

February 23rd, 2022

Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society of St. Bernard, hereinafter Los Isleños Society, a non-profit corporation domiciled in St. Bernard Civil Parish, Louisiana, respectfully submits to the United States Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans, its vehement opposition to awarding a permit to the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans to construct a container yard in the Violet Community of St. Bernard Parish. The permit application objected to by the Isleño Society is identified by the application number MVN-2020-00270-EG.

Los Isleños Society was incorporated in 1976 and has worked over more than four decades to preserve the cultural heritage of Spanish colonists from Spain's Canary Islands who founded St. Bernard Parish in 1779-1780. Los Isleños Society has worked to develop Los Isleños Museum Complex

which interprets to the public the history and cultural traditions of the Canary Islanders, known as Isleños, opening the museum complex grounds and buildings daily and by appointment. Public use and visitation was more than 45,000 people in 2019, the year before the onset of the Covid19 Pandemic.

The Isleño community has received national and international recognition from renowned academicians studying the distinct Spanish dialect spoken by Isleños of St. Bernard. Manuel Alvar, Ph.D., former director of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language in Madrid, Spain, studied the Isleños in the 1990s. His Excellency Adolfo Suarez, the first prime minister of Spain following the death of Francisco Franco visited the Isleños of St. Bernard and the museum complex in 1981. His Excellency Carlos Westendorp, Ambassador of Spain to the United States, visited the Isleños of St. Bernard and the museum complex as it was beginning to be rebuilt following hurricane Katrina in 2008. His Excellency Fernando Clavijo Batlle, former president of the Autonomous Region of the Canary Islands visited the Isleños of St. Bernard and the museum complex in 2018. Delegations of Los Isleños Society have had audiences with Their Majesties Juan Carlos I and Felipe VI, the former and present Kings of Spain in 1987, 2001 and 2018. Scores of nationally and internationally recognized academicians, elected and appointed officials from the national government of Spain and the Canaries have visited the museum complex and traditional fishing communities and experienced the remarkable Isleño cultural phenomenon over almost 50 years.

Los Isleños Society perceives that the Violet Container Yard project as proposed by the Port of New Orleans will result in the ruin of the museum complex and the fishing communities in eastern St. Bernard Parish, thus destroying the cultural legacies of the Isleños, Native Americans, African Americans, Filipinos and all others who have been part of the diversity that is St. Bernard Parish. The Isleños and others living in the wetland easternmost reaches of St. Bernard Parish traditionally were subsistence

livers, farming, trapping, fishing, hunting and gathering moss to earn livelihoods. This ruin will occur because of the isolation resulting from the proposed container yard, a facility which under existing conditions lacks adequate infrastructure, *i.e.* highway transportation arteries, railway service, overpasses or underpasses. More than short term consideration should be accorded to the design of the essential infrastructure considering what will be required 40, 50 or 60 years in the future. Indeed, as the character of maritime commerce evolves, will the Violet site be large enough to accommodate future container activity? Those knowledgeable about maritime container commerce suggest that a Port Fourchon type facility has the best potential for needed long term growth. Available land at the Violet site is probably insufficient to sustain long term future growth. Construction of these infrastructure elements will undoubtedly further compromise our natural environment, already ravaged by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet and other factors. The cultural heritage of the region is profoundly rooted in the natural environment, so as that environment is destroyed, so is the heritage of St. Bernard Parish.

The container yard development will destroy existing forested wetland areas which serve as natural drainage ponding areas. How will the loss of natural drainage patterns be addressed? Noise, air pollution, dust and other unwanted affects of the container yard will destroy the quality of life in all parts of St. Bernard Parish. Because both the Port of New Orleans and the Port of St. Bernard are public entities, the owners of the proposed container yard will pay no property taxes. Consequently, it appears likely that the citizens of St. Bernard Parish will be forced to pay increased taxes to fund construction and maintenance of transportation, drainage and other associated improvements necessary to sustain the proposed container yard. Additionally, what adverse impact will dredging the bottom of the Mississippi River channel have in introducing salt water to the river shoreline in St. Bernard Parish? Problems were documented in the 1990s with saltwater advancing up the Mississippi River during an extended

period of drought, thus potentially compromising drinking water in St. Bernard.

The call for public comment has been very short relative to this permit application. Many St. Bernard Parish citizens are unaware of the opportunity to comment and will be unable to do so. Los Isleños Society respectfully requests the Corps of Engineers to extend the period of public comment. Finally, Los Isleños Society requests that a public hearing be scheduled in Chalmette, Louisiana to allow the residents of St. Bernard Parish to voice their concerns about the permit application requested by the Port of New Orleans.



Alga Ben Crowe, President

Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society of St. Bernard

