

Written Testimony

By
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and
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before the

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Committee on Natural Resources

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on a topic of great importance to the economic well-being of our coastal communities and our nation. Our oceans are an economic engine for America, providing jobs and income through activities such as commercial and recreational fishing, tourism, shipping, offshore energy exploration and production, boating, wildlife watching, beach going, military and national security activities, and scientific and academic endeavors. Many of these are jobs that depend on close proximity to America's coasts and therefore cannot be shipped abroad. In addition, many of the industries supporting these jobs are dependent on properly functioning ocean ecosystems that produce numerous goods and services that Americans want and need. Among the critical goods and services we derive from our oceans and coasts are food, minerals, medicines, climate regulation, storm protection, and recreational opportunities. Unfortunately and without question, our oceans' ability to continue providing important goods and services that support American jobs is declining, threatening the coastal communities and ocean-based economies that depend on healthy marine resources and that are key pillars of the U.S. economy.

Our Oceans: A Bipartisan Issue

The decline of our oceans has been documented through decades of scientific research and was emphasized by the bi-partisan U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, which was created by a Republican-led Congress and whose members were appointed by President George W. Bush. The bi-partisan U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the private Pew Oceans Commission both concluded that this ocean decline is mainly the result of decades of uncoordinated, sector-based management of ocean and coastal resources. The bipartisan Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, a collaborative follow-up effort to support the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission, continues to strongly agree with this assessment and has encouraged both Republican and Democratic Administrations to establish policies and mechanisms that will better focus and coordinate our nations' ocean management systems to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of government.

Both Republican and Democratic Administrations have heeded this call. President George W. Bush established within his Administration an interagency ocean policy coordinating mechanism and facilitated federal support of multi-state regional efforts to address shared ocean and coastal issues. The Bush Administration also completed the first effort to prioritize and coordinate ocean science activities across the federal agencies. These actions were consistent with recommendations of the two ocean commissions and the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. They were an excellent start and demonstrated that better coordination of agencies working on related topics can and should be supported by leaders with a diversity of political perspectives.

In July 2010, President Obama took an important next step by signing Executive Order #13547 establishing the National Policy for the Stewardship of the Ocean, Our Coasts, and the Great Lakes. This is the first National Ocean Policy in U.S. history, and it aims to significantly improve the way we manage these valuable resources. The policy establishes a national commitment to ensuring that our ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources are managed in a way that ensures that both current and future generations can benefit from their bounty. It takes into account the need to sustain access to and use of these resources and acknowledges the important national security interests in our nation's use of ocean space. The establishment of this policy echoes one of the central recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and now the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. It was called for by leaders in the governmental, academic, business, and environmental communities for decades. It is a logical element of an effort to better focus and coordinate dozens of currently stove-piped agencies carrying out hundreds of statutes and regulations that govern our oceans.

The National Ocean Policy: An Opportunity for Improvement

While establishment of the National Ocean Policy is a major step forward, the coordination structures and tools needed to effectively implement the policy are still in their infancy. Success will require strong commitment and support from America's leaders at all levels. It will also require adequate funding and, because it will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of government and protect American jobs, should be prioritized, particularly in this time of economic challenges and fiscal austerity.

One tool for coordinating decision making about ocean resources that is currently being used successfully by states across the U.S. and that is being deployed to implement the National Ocean Policy at a regional level is coastal and marine spatial planning. Coastal and marine spatial planning is a public process that facilitates coordination, cooperation, and better decision making about uses of ocean space. Under the National Ocean Policy, regional bodies composed of state, tribal, and federal representatives will engage stakeholders in developing regional ocean management goals, considering information from across the full range of federal and state agencies, and identifying appropriate spaces for categories of ocean uses.

The process will not give federal agencies any new powers or authorities that they do not already have. In fact, the intention is to support and expedite decision making within existing authorities and ensure that federal agencies are coordinated in support of state and regional goals that are consistent with the National Ocean Policy. It is also important to clarify that coastal and marine spatial planning is not a management goal, but rather a tool to help managers make better decisions about ocean and coastal resources. If implemented with broad support and engagement it could make ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes governance more effective, efficient, and grounded in the needs of coastal states and local communities. It could identify opportunities for new investment and streamline decision making about new projects. It has the potential to help states and regions identify shared goals and make better decisions about what happens in the ocean waters that affect their economies and quality of life.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative: Recommendations for Action

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is dedicated to helping the U.S. and its leaders focus on ocean policy priorities that will ensure that our oceans and coasts are managed effectively and efficiently going forward. The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative recently released a report entitled *America's Ocean Future: Ensuring Healthy Oceans to Support a Vibrant Economy* that provides specific recommendations on actions needed to

effectively implement the National Ocean Policy. In 2012, the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative will assess progress on these recommendations publicly, similar to previous U.S. Ocean Policy Report Cards.

Full details on all of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative recommendations can be reviewed in the *America's Ocean Future* report available at www.jointoceancommission.org. If fully implemented, the following recommended actions would ensure that the National Ocean Policy facilitates the achievement of important economic and societal goals for our nation:

Congress and the Administration should fully implement the National Ocean Policy, taking the following actions in 2011 and 2012:

- The National Ocean Council should be given the resources needed to implement the National Ocean Policy to the fullest extent possible under existing authorities, as directed by Executive Order #13547.
- The National Ocean Council and participating federal agencies should use structures created by the National Ocean Policy to ensure robust coordination with, and support for, regional, state, tribal, and local priorities.
- The National Ocean Council should conduct a comprehensive interagency effort to review and amend ocean-related policies to reduce duplication and inefficiencies in the current ocean management system.

When implementing coastal and marine spatial planning, the National Ocean Council and regional planning bodies should ensure that:

- Stakeholder and public input is proactively sought and meaningful at every step.
- Federal agencies provide incentives for state and tribal participation, participate fully in the process, and comply with resulting coastal and marine spatial plans.
- Ecosystem health is the major goal, but current and future commercial activities are not slowed nor halted during the planning process.

Congress and the Administration should support an integrated ocean observing system so that managers can understand how ocean ecosystem changes will affect ocean resources, ocean economies, and the communities that depend on them.

They should also support the development of better models for forecasting ocean conditions under various management scenarios.

Federal agencies should work with regional planning bodies, states, tribes, and academia to conduct comprehensive regional ocean ecosystem assessments. These assessments should consider ecological, cultural, and economic characteristics and include the study of the value of ocean ecosystem services to society, as well as the

contributions that recreational uses of ocean and coastal resources make to the economy. They should be updated regularly and serve as the basis for planning and management activities at all levels of government.

Congress should immediately invest in the ocean economy by funding implementation of the National Ocean Policy. It should support FY 2012 funding for implementation of the nine national priority objectives identified in the National Ocean Policy and in particular support regional ocean partnerships. The National Ocean Council should prioritize National Ocean Policy implementation within existing agency budgets.

The Road Ahead: Working Together to Ensure Healthy Oceans for Diverse Uses

We all agree that our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes hold significant untapped potential for new and emerging ventures. Development of offshore renewable energy from wave, wind, tidal, and geothermal sources is a promising area that is expected to see significant growth in the future. Emerging fields such as offshore aquaculture, marine based research and drug discovery, short sea shipping, and deep seabed mining hold the promise of new jobs and sources of revenue. These fields will impact entire supply chains, including technology developers, engineers, manufacturers, installers, managers, and consumers of energy, seafood, and other goods. These endeavors have the potential to create numerous jobs and strong economic growth, but many of them will require finding compatibilities with existing uses of our crowded oceans in order to move forward. The National Ocean Policy and the interagency coordination and planning that it facilitates will help ensure that our nation realizes the future potential of its oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes, and will foster sound management of these resources going forward.

The National Ocean Policy is an opportunity to ensure that our oceans, which are held in the public trust for all Americans, are healthy, resilient, and capable of providing the high-quality American jobs and the important goods and services that the American people want and need now and in the future. The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative stands ready to work with you and other members of Congress to make the most of this opportunity by ensuring that an efficient and effective National Ocean Policy is implemented in a timely manner.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide you with written testimony.