



William Chandler, Vice President for Government Affairs

March 3, 2011

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf, Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives, H-307
Washington, DC 20515

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Marine Conservation Biology Institute (MCBI), based in Bellevue, WA, is a nonprofit conservation organization whose mission is to protect vast areas of the ocean. We use science to identify places in peril and advocate for bountiful, healthy oceans for current and future generations. I wish to thank the members of the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the FY 2012 appropriations for the Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). We are requesting an increase of \$46 million to maintain current research and management capabilities, while also implementing the National Ocean Policy.

America's oceans provide jobs, energy resources, food, recreation and tourism opportunities, as well as play a vital role in our Nation's economy, trade, and transportation. According to the National Ocean Economics Program, the US ocean economy contributes more than \$138 billion to our nation's Gross Domestic Product from living marine resources, tourism, recreation, transportation, construction, and mineral extraction. Additionally, over 2.3 million jobs in the US depend on the marine environment. Tourism and recreation alone account for over \$69 billion and over 1.7 million jobs of this total amount. Beyond the recreational services that oceans and waterways provide, US commercial fishing generated \$103 billion in national sales and supported 1.5 million jobs in 2008.

Keeping in mind the hard economic times our nation is in, I would like to highlight the importance of maintaining or moderately increasing funds for eight of NOAA's programs. MCBI recommends the following funding levels in 2012:

- National Marine Fisheries Service, Hawaiian monk seal recovery, \$5.5 million
- National Marine Fisheries Service, Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program, \$2.5 million
- National Ocean Service, Marine Debris Program, \$5 million
- National Ocean Service, National Marine Sanctuary Program, \$62 million
- National Ocean Service, Marine Protected Areas Program, \$4 million
- National Ocean Service, Coral Reef Conservation Program, \$32 million
- National Ocean Service, Coastal & Marine Spatial Planning, \$10 million
- National Ocean Service, Regional Ocean Partnerships, \$30 million
- Office of Oceanic & Atmospheric Research, Ocean Acidification, \$11.6 million.

Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery

The Hawaiian monk seal is one of the most critically endangered marine mammals in the world. It is also the only marine mammal whose entire distribution range lies within our national jurisdiction; thus the US has sole responsibility for its continued survival. Over the last 50 years, the Hawaiian monk seal population has declined to an all time low of less than 1200 individuals. The majority of the Hawaiian monk seals reside in the remote Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument; however, a smaller (but growing) population resides in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). The MHI population may serve as the “insurance” population for this species.

The recovery program has benefited greatly from the subcommittee’s decision to more than double the funds for the program since 2008. Your action has created crucial momentum to protect the Hawaiian monk seal from extinction by enabling NOAA to establish year round research field camps, conduct outreach to fishermen and the general public concerning the seal’s ecological and cultural importance, provide urgent care and supplies, and continue vital research studies on disease and mortality mitigation.

The Administration has recommended \$2.5 million for the monk seal account. In order to guarantee that the seal recovery effort continue apace, MCBI strongly recommends a minimum of \$5.5 million for continued Hawaiian monk seal recovery efforts. This amount maintains the current level of funding to the program.

A severe decrease in funding would devastate NOAA’s current efforts to protect this iconic Hawaiian marine mammal. This decrease would severely handicap the research and management efforts of the program by reducing the number of field camps, outreach campaigns, and urgent care needs.

Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program

The discovery of widespread deep sea coral ecosystems within US waters has challenged scientists to learn the extent of these important ecosystems and develop strategies on how to protect them. The Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program was established by NOAA under the *Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act (MSRA) of 2006*. NOAA is charged with mapping and monitoring locations where deep sea corals are likely to occur, developing technologies designed to reduce interactions between fishing gear and deep sea corals, and working with fishery management councils to protect coral habitats.

MCBI was pleased to see increased funding for the National Marine Fisheries Service Deep Sea Coral Program to a level of \$2.5 million in FY 2010 and would like to see that level sustained in FY 2012. Previous funding has allowed for coral habitat mapping in the SE Atlantic region. Sustained funding will permit the continued mapping of coral areas off the West Coast, as well as the initiation of coral mapping in Alaska waters. There is a great need for habitat assessments to inform management and development decisions; reduced funding levels would severely hamper the compilation of this information.

Marine Debris Program

Marine debris has become one of the most widespread pollution problems affecting the world's oceans and waterways. Recently, much attention has been given by the press to the huge floating garbage patch in the Pacific Ocean and its impacts on ocean life and places like Hawaii. Research has shown that debris has serious effects on the marine environment, wildlife, the economy, and human health and safety. An estimated 4.2 million pounds of debris was recovered from US beaches in 2009.

Marine debris in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) contributes to avian and marine wildlife decline through ingestion and entanglement, and is one of the chief causes of death for the critically endangered Hawaiian monk seals that live there. An estimated 700 metric tons (mt) of marine debris, primarily derelict fishing gear, was removed from NWHI coral reefs and beaches by NOAA between 1996 and 2006. However, removal efforts are not keeping up with accumulation and marine debris continues to be a perpetual threat to the Hawaiian monk seal and seabirds in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

The Marine Debris Research, Prevention and Reduction Act was enacted in 2006. The act established a national program led by NOAA to identify, assess, reduce and prevent marine debris and its effects on the marine environment. The Marine Debris Program has been level funded at \$4 million since 2008. MCBI recommends NOAA's Marine Debris Program receive a minimum of \$4 million in FY 2012 to maintain marine debris removal and mitigation efforts. However, MCBI recommends the program receive an additional \$1 million to ramp up efforts to prevent and reduce the loss of fishing gear by the industry. Greater than 30 tons of derelict fishing gear is removed annually in the NWHI every year which causes damage to coral reefs and threatens the survival of many key species.

Reduced funding would decrease marine debris collection efforts in the NWHI, terminate outreach and education partnership grants both regionally and nationally, and reduce basic research efforts to better understand the impacts of marine debris on our ecosystems and human health.

National Marine Sanctuaries

Presently, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is responsible for managing the nation's 13 marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Collectively, these 14 units cover more area than the National Park System.

MCBI recommends \$64 million to operate and maintain management capabilities for the National Marine Sanctuary System. This amount maintains FY 2010 funding levels, but funnels all funds to the Operations, Research, and Facilities (ORF) Account. This increase in the ORF account will allow the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to fulfill its responsibilities as a leader in ocean management and conservation. The funding would not only restore reduced operations, but would also support better monitoring and enforcement, education and outreach programs, vessel and visitor center operations, and scientific research, including climate monitoring and historical ecology.

A decrease in funding would be detrimental to the program by terminating valuable science,

education/outreach, and resource management positions, reducing collaborative efforts among partners, ceasing upkeep measures needed for vessel operations, and reducing management efforts within sanctuaries and monuments.

Marine Protected Areas Program

NOAA is charged with implementing Executive Order 13158, *Marine Protected Areas*, which directs federal agencies to develop a national system of marine protected areas (MPAs). These areas are critical to maintaining biological diversity, protecting ocean habitats, and effectively managing fish populations. Under the program, NOAA is tasked with undertaking a gap analysis to identify which additional types of marine areas should be protected.

Given the ongoing loss of our marine resources, the implementation of the executive order has moved too slowly, partly due to insufficient funding. MCBI recommends \$4 million for the MPA Center in FY 2011, a slight increase above the enacted FY 2010 level, but below the FY 2004 enacted level of \$4.9 million. Critical program needs to be addressed with these additional funds include developing and expanding the national system of MPAs, allowing for stakeholder involvement in gap analyses and regional planning efforts, and developing a methodology to collect data on human uses of the ocean throughout the country and prepare maps of where these uses occur, and how they conflict with one another or with marine conservation needs. This information is vital to decisions about managing ocean uses.

Coral Reef Conservation Program

NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation (CRCP) Program manages NOAA's coral reef programs including both deep sea corals, as directed by the Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program, and shallow water corals. Deep sea corals research and conservation is funded under the National Marine Fisheries Service (discussed above) and shallow water corals research and conservation activities are funded under the National Ocean Service.

CRCP's shallow water coral activities focus on improving understanding of tropical coral reef ecosystems and minimizing the threats to their health and viability. Due to limited resources, CRCP has narrowed its efforts to better understand and address the top three global threats: climate change, fishing, and pollution. MCBI recommends \$32 million to sustain and enhance the Coral Reef Conservation Program. These funds will aid in addressing the top three global threats by monitoring and forecasting climate change impacts on coral reefs, reducing additional threats to coral reef ecosystems, and combating land-based sources of pollution.

Coastal & Marine Spatial Planning

Coastal and marine spatial planning (CMSP) is the tool adopted to implement the President's National Ocean Policy (2010). CMSP is a comprehensive, integrated, ecosystem-based approach that addresses conservation, economic activity, user conflict, and the sustainable use of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources. A strong National Policy will help our nation rebuild overexploited fisheries, protect endangered species, restore vulnerable habitats, and develop measures to address marine impacts of climate change, all of which will strengthen our nation's economy.

Coastal and marine spatial planning requires a long term commitment, as well as adequate and sustained resources. MCBI is encouraged by the Administration's recommendation of \$6.7 million for coastal and marine spatial planning, but recommends an increased funding level of \$10 million to ensure the proper set up of key programs. This funding will support habitat mapping and characterization using existing data sets at NOAA; human use patterns mapping and user conflicts analysis; identification of current management authorities and jurisdictions; development of decision support tools; initial regional planning; and coordination of multiple agency efforts. A failure to support this initiative will impede our nation's efforts to manage our oceans in a more sustainable manner.

Regional Ocean Partnerships

Regional Ocean Partnerships (ROP) are a component of the *Framework for Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning*. Coastal states have already established regional ocean partnerships, many of which will inform the regional planning bodies that will implement CMSP. These partnerships will be used as place-based lenses through which funding can be focused for marine and coastal priorities at a state and regional level.

MCBI recommends \$30 million for regional ocean partnerships to provide competitive grants to address priority marine and coastal issues within each region.

Ocean Acidification

Ocean acidification is the process by which seawater becomes corrosive to calcium carbonate structures found in many of the shells and skeletons of marine organisms, such as oysters and corals. It is a major marine impact associated with elevated carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. Ocean acidification has already begun to negatively impact commercial and recreational fishing, as well as coastal communities and economies.

The Federal Ocean Acidification Research and Monitoring (FOARAM) Act that passed in early 2009 calls upon NOAA to coordinate research, establish a monitoring program, identify and develop adaptation strategies and techniques, encourage interdisciplinary and international understanding of the impacts associated with ocean acidification, improve public education outreach, and provide critical research grants to understanding the ecosystem impacts and socioeconomic effects of ocean acidification. Ocean acidification research was appropriated at \$6 million in FY 2010. MCBI supports the presidential recommendation of \$11.6 million in FY 2012 to more fully understand the impacts of ocean acidification on our coastal communities.

In summary, MCBI respectfully requests that the subcommittee maintain or slightly augment funding for the conservation side of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's budget by the amounts discussed above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "WJ Chandler".

William Chandler