



William Chandler, VP for Government Affairs

March 16, 2012

*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 Institute, based in Bellevue, WA, is a nonprofit conservation organization that uses the latest science to identify important marine ecosystems around the world, and then advocates for their protection. I wish to thank the members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the FY 2013 appropriations and request \$5.3 billion for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This level of funding would support satellite acquisition, while restoring funding for the ocean, coastal, and fisheries programs to the FY 2010 enacted level.

America's oceans play a vital role in our nation's economy. According to the National Ocean Economics Program, the US ocean economy contributes more than \$130 billion to our nation's Gross Domestic Product from living marine resources, tourism, recreation, transportation, and construction. Additionally, over 2.4 million jobs in the US depend on the marine environment. NOAA's programs are critical to fostering this activity and protecting ocean health for sustained use.

I would like to highlight a few programs of particular interest to Marine Conservation Institute which focus on NOAA's conservation mandate.

Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery

NOAA has responsibility for recovering the Hawaiian monk seal, 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 less than 1200 individuals. The majority of the population resides in the remote Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument; however, a smaller (but growing) population resides in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI).

NOAA is making progress implementing the monk seal recovery plan, and needs additional resources to stay on track. It has been conservatively estimated that 30% of the monk seals alive today are due to direct actions by NOAA and its partners¹.

¹ McAvoy, Audrey. "Feds – Efforts to rescue monk seals helping species." Associated Press in West Hawaii Today, January 26, 2012

The subcommittee's decisions to more than double the program funds to approximately \$5.6 million) in FY 2009 and FY 2010 created crucial momentum to protect the Hawaiian monk seal from extinction. NOAA conducts annual research field camps in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, conducts outreach to fishermen and the general public concerning the seal's ecological and cultural importance, intervenes to rescue entangled or wounded seals, investigates seal deaths, and conducts vital research studies on disease and mortality mitigation.

However, funding levels were cut in half to about \$2.7 million for FY 2011 and FY 2012. Maintaining this level of reduced funding will continue to restrain the rollout of recovery actions, including the translocation of seals to areas where they can mature with greater likelihood of survival. Marine Conservation Institute strongly recommends the subcommittee reinstate funding to \$5.5 million in FY 2013.

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.

Marine Conservation Institute was pleased to see increased funding for the National Marine Fisheries Service's Deep Sea Coral Program to a level of \$2.5 million in FY 2010; we recommend that level be sustained in FY 2013. Previous funding has allowed for coral habitat mapping and analysis along the West Coast and in Southeastern US waters. Sustained funding will permit the continued mapping of coral areas off the West Coast and in Alaska, as well as the initiation of coral mapping in Mid-Atlantic waters. There is a great need for habitat assessments to inform fisheries management and development decisions. Reduced funding levels would hamper the compilation of this information.

Marine Debris Program

Marine trash has become one of the most widespread pollution problems affecting the world's oceans and waterways. An estimated 8.6 million pounds of debris was recovered worldwide in 2010. Recently, much attention has been given by the press to the debris generated by the Japan tsunami tragedy, and its impacts on ocean life and tourism in Hawaii and along the West Coast. Research has shown that debris has serious effects on the marine environment, wildlife, the economy, and human health and safety. It is estimated that as much as 100,000 tons of tsunami debris could reach the US over the next several years².

² McAvoy, Audrey. "Tsunami debris spreads halfway across Pacific." *Associated Press in Seattle Times*, February 28, 2012.

The Marine Debris Research, Prevention and Reduction Act was enacted in 2006 to identify, assess, reduce and prevent marine debris and its effects on the marine environment. The Marine Debris Program received a much needed increase in FY 2012 to a level of \$5 million to address the incoming tsunami debris. The President's FY 2013 budget recommends relocating the Marine Debris Program to the National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Habitat Conservation. While understanding the need to improve efficiency, Marine Conservation Institute believes the program would be more effective if it remained under the National Ocean Service at the current funding level of \$5 million. Current placement allows the program to leverage resources available to the Office of Response and Restoration and work in better collaboration with fisherman since the program is currently housed under the National Ocean Service and not together with the regulators of the National Marine Fisheries Service.

National Marine Sanctuaries

Presently, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) 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.

Marine Conservation Institute recommends \$54.5 million in FY 2013. This amount includes \$49 million for the operations and research account, and \$5.5 million for the construction account. This would allow ONMS to better fulfill its responsibilities as a leader in ocean management and conservation. The funding would allow ONMS to maintain current management capabilities and complete current construction projects. Less funding would likely require the termination of contractors performing FTE duties, eliminate most vessel days at sea, and reduce operations at many visitor centers, thereby reducing local community benefits.

The President's FY 2013 budget recommends merging the Marine Protected Areas Center with the National Marine Sanctuaries Program. If this merger were to occur, I recommend funding for the ONMS be increased by \$4 million to ensure the MPA Center mission and projects continue.

Regional Ocean Partnerships

Regional Ocean Partnerships (ROP) facilitate the cooperation and integration of ocean and coastal resources management between local, state, and federal agencies. Coastal states Governors have already established several regional ocean partnerships to collaboratively address priority marine and coastal issues.

The President's FY 2013 budget requests \$4.0 million in FY 2013 to provide competitive grants to address issues within each US region. While this amount is \$0.5 million above enacted FY 2012 levels, it is \$3.5 million below the FY 2011 enacted level. Marine Conservation Institute recommends a minimum funding level of \$7.5 million to assist these important collaborative efforts.

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 shellfish, corals, and fish. 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 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 outreach, and provide critical research grants to increase understanding of the ecosystem impacts and socioeconomic effects of ocean acidification. Ocean acidification research received \$6.4 million in FY 2012. Marine Conservation Institute recommends a level of \$11.6 million in FY 2013 to more fully understand the impacts of ocean acidification on our coastal communities and economy.

Law Enforcement

NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) is responsible for enforcing the laws that conserve and protect our nation's fisheries, protected species, and national marine sanctuaries and monuments. The office is also responsible for enforcing the United States' international commitments to fight illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, a practice that threatens to undermine global fish stocks, such as the Pacific tuna fishery in which the US participates. In addition, the Office of General Counsel Enforcement Section provides legal services and guidance to NOAA's OLE.

NOAA's jurisdiction spans 3.4 square million miles of coastal and marine environments, including the nation's 13 marine sanctuaries and 4 marine national monuments. The Pacific region alone poses a challenge for NOAA law enforcement as it spans 1.5 million square miles, nearly one half of the US Exclusive Economic Zone.

Marine Conservation Institute strongly supports the President's FY 2013 budget request of \$67.1 million for NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement. This will allow OLE to maintain current capabilities, while potentially adding additional resources in the Pacific region. Marine Conservation Institute also recommends an additional \$150,000 for another attorney in the Pacific Islands Office of General Council Enforcement Section, as there is currently only one attorney with no support staff.

Marine Operations and Maintenance

The Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) operates NOAA's fleet of specialized ships to fulfill the agency's environmental and scientific missions. OMAO provides vessels for fisheries research, oceanographic and atmospheric research, and hydrographic surveys. Ships are also used for monitoring marine sanctuaries and monuments, and servicing the early warning tsunami and weather system equipment.

Not since 2007 has OMAO operated its ships at full capacity, largely due to budget constraints. In 2011, OMAO allocated base ship time for each of its 17 vessels at about 135 days-at-sea, which is about 55% of the fleet's operational capability (max = 220 days per vessel). NOAA's program offices have had to 'buy' additional days to fulfill some of their basic mandates. For instance, the National Marine Fisheries Service purchased an additional 542 days in FY 2011. Unfortunately, the line offices are experiencing budget constraints as well.

It makes no sense for NOAA's ships to be partially idle when one of NOAA's primary missions is to manage and restore our oceans. Marine Conservation Institute supports the President's Request of \$166 million for OMAO in FY 2013. It is a step toward more fully funding NOAA's fleet to fulfill its mandates.

In summary, Marine Conservation Institute respectfully requests that the subcommittee maintain or slightly augment funding for the conservation side of the NOAA budgets by the amounts discussed above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "WJ Chandler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

William Chandler