



Kassandra Cerveney, Congressional Relations Manager

March 27, 2009

The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan, Chair  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
Re: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives, H-310  
Washington, DC 20510

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Marine Conservation Biology Institute, based in Bellevue, WA, is a national, nonprofit environmental organization whose mission is to advance the science of marine conservation biology and secure protection for ocean ecosystems. Within this context, we advocate adequate appropriations for NOAA programs that focus on understanding and conserving marine ecosystems, habitats and species. 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 2010 budget regarding appropriations for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). There are five programs that deserve increased funding on which I wish to address today. Hawaiian monk seal recovery funded at \$7 million, Marine Debris Program funded at \$10 million, the National Marine Sanctuary Program funded at \$80 million, the Marine Protected Areas program funded at \$5 million, and the Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program funded at \$7 million is the adequate funding levels we seek in the FY 2010 appropriations process.

### **Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery**

For several years, Hawaiian monk seal recovery has faltered due to lack of funds. FY 2009 appropriations has created crucial momentum to alter the downward spiral of the monk seal population in part due to this critical program's long standing low funding levels. MCBI is grateful to this committee for understanding the plight of this species and taking necessary steps to begin to fund the recovery effort.

The Hawaiian monk seal is one of the most critically endangered marine mammals in the world, and is the only US marine mammal whose entire range lies within our national jurisdiction. Most Hawaiian monk seals reside in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Over the last 50 years, the Hawaiian monk seal population has declined to an all time low of less than 1200 individuals.

The Hawaiian monk seal is currently headed toward extinction unless the National Marine Fisheries Service and its partner agencies aggressively budget for, and execute key recommendations of the 2007 recovery plan, which seeks among many things, to protect and enhance the overall number of juvenile female seals reaching breeding age. This goal is not impossible, but will require a variety of simultaneous actions over the next five years at a projected annual cost of \$7 million as outlined within the recovery plan. Although this may seem excessive, in comparison, the Steller sea lion with a current Western population of

approximately 45,000 has received \$57 million in conservation support in the last ten years, while the more critically endangered Hawaiian monk seal has only received approximately \$23 million over the same time period.

To rebuild the population, the recovery plan must be implemented assertively and on a continuous basis. For FY 2010, MCBI recommends a minimum of maintaining the recently appropriated FY 2009 levels of no less than \$5.734 million and urges the appropriation of a full **\$7 million** as detailed for the implementation of the recovery plan. That would include the necessary funds to carry out the crucial components for monk seal recovery plan which include:

- hiring a Seal Recovery Coordinator,
- hiring Field Response and Management Leaders,
- developing an emerging disease research plan,
- conducting a main Hawaiian islands population survey,
- allowing for an urgent care veterinarian and necessary supplies,
- reinstating field camp efforts,
- and providing for a public education and outreach program.

### **Marine Debris Program**

Marine debris has become one of the most widespread pollution problems affecting the world's oceans and waterways. Research has proven that debris has serious effects on the marine environment, marine wildlife, the economy, and human health and safety. In many regions, marine debris is wreaking havoc on our oceans and the species that depend on the ocean for survival. Marine debris in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands contribute to wildlife decline through ingestion and entanglement.

An estimated 492 metric tons (MT) of marine debris was removed from the Northwest Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) by NOAA between 1996 and 2006. Over 100 MT of debris were removed from the NWHI in both FY 2003 and FY 2004 during an island-wide cleanup effort. In 2006, the Marine Debris Project entered into a maintenance phase, which was intended to keep up with new debris accumulation. In FY 2006, NOAA removed an estimated 19 MT of debris in the islands. Yet, NOAA currently estimates an annual accumulation rate of 52 MT of marine debris for the NWHI. Therefore, maintenance funding is not keeping up with the problem and is a perpetual threat to the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal and seabirds in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

Funding for debris removal in the NWHI peaked during the island-wide cleanup effort at \$3 million in FY 2001-2003, but has since dropped in the maintenance phase to \$500,000 in FY 2006 and in FY 2007 (due to the continuing resolution). 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 effect on the marine environment with a recommended allocation of \$10 million a year. In FY 2008, \$4 million was budgeted for the Marine Debris Program with \$190,000 of that money specifically allocated to the NWHI. The FY 2009 Appropriations Omnibus kept the Marine Debris Program level funded at \$4 million.

Additional resources are needed to enhance the ability of NOAA to assess the amount, sources, and impacts of marine debris, maintain support to current removal projects, develop management practices, reduce derelict fishing gear, and conduct education and outreach measures. Furthermore, many types of research require long-term commitments of funding to fully address the question being asked; the Marine Debris Program would be able to learn more about the impacts of marine debris and ways to prevent and mitigate it by funding critical research projects around species of concern like the monk seal, which are key to directing removal and prevention resources. MCBI recommends **\$10 million** for NOAA's Marine Debris Program as recommended in the Marine Debris Research, Prevention and Reduction Act.

### **National Marine Sanctuaries**

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

Given the crucial need to better protect sanctuary resources, MCBI recommends a significant increase in funding of \$20 million in FY 2010, bringing the overall program budget to **\$80 million**. Of this \$80 million, MCBI recommends \$60 million for the Operations, Research and Facilities base and \$20 million for Procurement, Acquisition and Construction. An investment of \$80 million would enhance and sustain the effectiveness of individual sites and the system as a whole, allowing the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to fulfill its responsibilities as a leader in ocean management and conservation. The funding would support monitoring and enforcement responsibilities, education and outreach programs, and scientific research.

### **Marine Protected Areas Program**

NOAA is also 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 maintain biological diversity, protect ocean habitats, and effectively manage fish populations. Within this 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. After receiving a start-up budget of \$3 million in FY 2001, the MPA Center's budget reached almost \$5 million in FY 2004, then dropped rather abruptly to \$1.5 million in FY 2007 and 2008. During this period of decline, the center lost 70% of its staff (18 full and part-time employees). Only just recently with the FY2009 Appropriations Omnibus has a reversal of this budget slashing been seen with an increase in program funding to \$2.9 million. MCBI was pleased to see this committee take interest in the MPA Center and increase funds for this program to meet its mandate.

MCBI recommends an **additional \$2.1 million** for the MPA Center in FY 2010 so that the MPA Center can properly carry out the goals of the implementing and expanding a national system of

MPAs, the gap analysis mentioned earlier, rendering technical assistance to state-level MPA programs, and maintaining its MPA inventory.

### **Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program**

With the recent discovery of extensive deep sea coral ecosystems within US waters and the understanding of their importance, scientists are now challenged to learn the extent of these systems and how to protect them. MCBI was very pleased to see start-up funding for the program at \$1.5 million. With expensive technology and research vessel time for mapping deep sea coral systems, an **additional \$5.5 million** could be used to fund known research needs.

An area of the southeastern US shelf edge and slope spanning approximately 23,000 square miles is of top priority for mapping and scientific studies for the conservation of deep sea corals. With adequate funding, extensive mapping of this southeastern shelf can be accomplished with three 30-day scientific cruises at approximately \$2 million per cruise.

Additionally, the Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program can and should develop an on board fishery observer by-catch workshops. These workshops will cross-train observers to identify corals brought up by commercial fishers, as well as evaluate the continued impacts fishing has on seafloor corals. \$1 million will fund at least three by-catch training workshops.

In summary, MCBI respectfully requests that the subcommittee augment funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views,

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

Kassandra Cerveny