

April 2, 2009

TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE SAM FARR  
BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE,  
AND RELATED AGENCIES

Chairman Mollohan, Ranking Member Wolf, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony to you.

I come here today not only on my own behalf, but also as one of three co-chairs of the House Oceans Caucus. The other co-chairs of this bipartisan leadership on ocean issues are Reps. Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) and Jay Inslee (D-WA). Together we championed an effort to send a letter to this subcommittee in support of programmatic funding increases for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), garnering over 50 co-signers.

It is undeniable that our oceans and coasts are among our greatest natural resources. Over half of the US population lives in coastal states. Coastal and marine waters support over 2.8 million jobs and the coastal economy generates half of the nation's GDP. The culture, economy, and security of our Nation depend on the health and sustainability of these assets, yet we are not sufficiently managing and protecting them. Though the budget this year is more constrained than ever, I respectfully urge you to make oceans a funding priority. An increased and sustained investment now will enhance the benefits we reap in the future. This need was highlighted by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy report, and the Joint Ocean Commission report issued in 2004 and 2006, respectively.

In February of last year, the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative (JOCI)—lead by Admiral James Watkins (Ret.) of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Honorable Leon Panetta, then of the Pew Ocean Commission—released its 2007 U.S. Ocean Policy Report Card. The Report Card measures the effectiveness of federal and state government in achieving a condensed list of policy priorities for our oceans. The grade given for “New Funding for Ocean Policy and Programs” was a D+. This improvement from the F given the previous year for funding is an encouraging sign; still more so was the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, which allocated \$4.37 billion to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the lead federal agency for ocean-related management and activities. The preceding years of inadequate funding for NOAA have led to a serious erosion of capabilities and NOAA is still not receiving the funds they need to respond to the 10 priority policy recommendations JOCI made to Congress *at our request*.

Along those lines, I want to emphasize the invaluable services and programs of NOAA. Among these are the National Marine Sanctuary Program, the Integrated Ocean Observing Program, the National Sea Grant College Program, the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, and the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program, not to mention the National Weather Service, which, while not an 'ocean' agency *per se*, provides the weather data that virtually all Americans rely on. Combined, the many NOAA activities support necessary ocean protection, research, exploration, and education, facilitating America's trade and commerce, leisure and recreation, and putting seafood on our tables. Therefore, it is important that we make significant progress toward increasing NOAA's funding to \$5 billion in the very near term. The president's FY10 budget request outline, while providing increased funding to the Department of Commerce and allocating \$1.3 billion to NOAA's satellite capabilities, does not explicitly stipulate necessary budget increases for NOAA's many other vital programs. But it does indicate the President's commitment to some, identifying the need to support research to further our understanding of ocean acidification and to fully implement the Magnuson-Stevens Act in order to end overfishing. It is critical that NOAA's many other important programs and responsibilities be funded at a level commensurate with their value to the American people.

As a Member of California's coastal delegation, I am intimately connected to and an advocate for the oceans. Several of the programs under NOAA's jurisdiction and other private/state entities are represented in my district and help make it one of the most dynamic coastal destinations in the country. For instance, it includes the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary—the Nation's second largest marine sanctuary supporting one of the world's most diverse marine ecosystems—the National Marine Protected Area Center and Science Institute, and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. In addition, it houses several top ocean research laboratories and education institutions (e.g., University of California at Santa Cruz, Moss Landing Marine Lab, California State University at Monterey Bay, and Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station), where key studies/programs are conducted related to highly migratory species like sharks and tuna, protected species like salmon, ocean observing, data collections on fish stocks and ocean economics, and basic research to increase our understanding of the ocean. Of course, these are also several attractive areas that support a high influx of coastal tourism annually.

I cannot emphasize enough the need to show our ocean stewardship now, so we can turn the tide on the dire threats facing our ocean. Therefore, I would appreciate your support in funding NOAA and its programs that are of critical importance to my district and to our nation. Please consider this written testimony for the record. I do understand the requested investment is sizable; however, it has to be done to protect our largest public trust. Let's follow on the positive start in 2009's budget and make the necessary strides in the 2010 cycle to give this agency the resources to fully realize its mission, to effectively provide its many products and services to the American people, and to understand and manage the ocean that we all rely on.