

April 26, 2007

TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE SAM FARR
BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
ON H.R. 21: OCEANS-21

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Brown, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing on H.R. 21, the "*Oceans Conservation, Education, and National Strategy for the 21st Century Act*" (also known as "OCEANS-21").

H.R. 21 is the product of years of work from a wide range of people. Before I address the content of the bill, I want to describe the process leading up to today, because I believe this will demonstrate the dire need and public support for action on this issue.

In June of 1998, the White House held its first National Oceans Conference in my district in Monterey. President Clinton and Vice President Gore spoke, and three Cabinet members attended. This event provoked Congress to pass the Oceans Act of 2000. The Oceans Act created the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy to review this nation's management of the oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes, which had not been done since the Stratton Commission in 1965.

The Commission was tasked with making recommendations for a coordinated and comprehensive national ocean policy. At the same time, the Pew Charitable Trust founded the Pew Ocean Commission to independently review this nation's ocean policy. Both commissions were comprised of highly respected scientists, politicians, corporate executives, and coastal community representatives. Between these two commissions, they visited more than forty cities around the country and took comments from thousands of citizens.

These reports were conducted simultaneously, but independently. The Pew Ocean Commission released their report in May of 2003 and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy in July of 2004. Both reports highlight the importance of the oceanic, coastal, and Great Lake resources to the U.S. economy, the degraded state of these resources and the ecosystems that support them, and the need to change the way we manage these resources. The reports and recommendations were so similar, the Chairs of both commissions agreed to form the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative in 2005 to advocate the adoption of a consolidated version of their commissions' recommendations. The report entitled "Sea to Shinning Sea" was released in June 2006.

As the commissions were finishing their reports, I worked with Mr. Allen and Mr. Saxton and the commissions' staff to author a bill that would implement their recommendations. That first version was introduced jointly by several co-chairs of the House Oceans Caucus shortly after the U.S. Commission released their report. The bill that is before you now is the third time we've introduced it, and I am the third Member of Congress to carry it.

H.R. 21 was significantly revised before it was introduced this year. Most importantly, we removed the ocean science, education, and exploration components and focused on ocean governance. All that remains now is a meaningful national ocean policy and the governance structures necessary to implement it. Some highlights of the bill are:

Title I: Establishment of a National Oceans Policy

- Establishes a national oceans policy "...to protect, maintain, and restore the health of marine ecosystems...",
- Establishes standards for applying this policy to federal activities that impact the oceans and coasts, and
- Includes an implementation mechanism to ensure that the standards are met.

Title II: NOAA Organic Act

- Establishes NOAA as an agency within the Department of Commerce,
- Includes a section on resource management, and
- Adds Education to NOAA's mission.

Title III: National Ocean Leadership and Coordination

- Creates a system to advise the President on ocean issues and coordinate Federal agency activities that effect the ocean, and
- Codifies the Committee on Ocean Policy, which has been authorized by executive order.

Title IV: Regional Coordination and Ecosystem Planning

- Establishes a system of regional partnerships for coordinating federal activities that impact the ocean, and
- Establishes a network to share information about the ocean ecosystem in each region.

Title V: Ocean and Great Lakes Conservation Trust Fund

- Creates a pool of money to fund the activities required by this act, and
- Authorizes the money to come from General Revenue, an Ocean Stamp, money that hasn't been spent in previous years, and interest.

Title VI: Administration Funding

- Authorizes NOAA to receive appropriated funds, and
- Allows those funds to be available until they have been spent.

In closing, thank you again for holding this hearing today. I look forward to continuing to work with the committee, nongovernmental partners, federal agencies and others to pass this bill this Congress.