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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**HEARING ON
OCEAN POLICY PRIORITIES IN THE UNITED STATES**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

March 29, 2007

Good afternoon Chairwoman Bordallo, Congressman Brown, and Members of the Committee. I am Mary Glackin, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Program Planning and Integration at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), in the Department of Commerce. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on Ocean Policy Priorities in the United States, and NOAA's role in implementing components of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*.

On September 20, 2004, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy fulfilled its congressional mandate to submit recommendations for a coordinated and comprehensive national ocean policy to the President and Congress. The Commission's final report, *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century*, contains 212 recommendations addressing a broad range of ocean and coastal topics. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy outlined the need for enhancing ocean leadership and coordination, developing the institutional capacity to coordinate across jurisdictional boundaries, and strengthening the agency structure in phases in order to enhance the goal of addressing management needs through an ecosystem-based approach.

In response to the Commission's findings and recommendations, the President issued Executive Order 13366, on December 17, 2004, establishing a Cabinet-level Committee on Ocean Policy, whose membership includes the Secretaries of Commerce, State, Defense, the Interior, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Transportation, Energy, and Homeland Security, and the Attorney General. Other members of the Committee on Ocean Policy include the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Director of National Intelligence, the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Director of the National Science Foundation, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs, Homeland Security, Domestic Policy, Economic Policy, and an employee of the Office of the Vice President. The Committee on Ocean Policy

created a framework to coordinate the ocean and coastal related activities of over 20 federal agencies that administer over 140 laws, and facilitates coordination and support to the numerous state, tribal, and local programs with the overall goal of improved ocean governance. At the same time, the President released the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, which identifies immediate short-term and long-term actions necessary to more effectively manage coastal and ocean resources.

In the two years since the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* was released, the federal agencies, together with their state, local, territorial, and tribal partners, have made substantial progress in meeting their commitments to the actions in the *Plan*. To identify specific areas of progress and opportunities that have led agencies to move beyond the *Plan*, the Committee on Ocean Policy released the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan Implementation Update* in January 2007 (http://ocean.ceq.gov/oap_update012207.pdf). Given the significant progress the Administration has made in completing the commitments of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* (83% of the actions have been met, the remaining 17% are on schedule to be completed by their target dates), federal agencies are moving forward with new activities in these areas to continue to improve our management and protection of ocean resources.

Both the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, and the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, recognize that partnerships are vital to halting the degradation of our oceans, and to our realizing their full potential. Thus, an underlying theme of my testimony today is “partnerships are essential for success,” as NOAA fully supports Executive Order 13352, *Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation*. There are many agencies with important ocean and coastal responsibilities with which NOAA partners, and we take great pride and place great importance in continuing to strengthen our role as the lead civilian ocean agency.

NOAA is at the center of the federal government’s understanding, awareness, and stewardship of our ocean resources and has been given a lead role in carrying through on the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. Because of the size and breadth of NOAA’s involvement in the implementing activities, today I will highlight just a few results from the six sections of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. These will demonstrate how NOAA is actively working with federal, state, tribal, and international partners, as well as Congress and other stakeholders, to meet our nation’s challenges with respect to the oceans. I will begin by highlighting a few of the legislative priorities that would allow NOAA to improve its effectiveness at addressing issues raised by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy.

NOAA’s Legislative Priorities in the 110th Congress

NOAA has a number of ocean-oriented legislative priorities in the 110th Congress. In addition to the priorities listed below, NOAA is also working with our interagency partners on Administration bills that address hydrographic services, marine mammal protection, and cooperative conservation.

Legislative Priority — National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2007

On March 12, 2007, Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez unveiled the Administration's *National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2007*. Enactment of this bill will provide the Department of Commerce the authority to regulate aquaculture in federal waters and to establish a coordinated process among the federal agencies and affected coastal states. We envision a one-stop regulatory shop for authorization that is required from within the Department of Commerce. NOAA will coordinate the regulatory process for the Commerce Department as a part of its environmental stewardship responsibilities, working closely with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). NOAA looks forward to working with this Committee to move legislation forward to allow us to begin a public rulemaking process to produce a comprehensive, environmentally sound permitting and regulatory program for aquaculture in federal waters.

Legislative Priority — NOAA Organic Act

An ocean leadership priority identified in both the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* is the passage of a *NOAA Organic Act*. We believe it is necessary to consolidate into one authorization NOAA's myriad purposes and responsibilities, which now reside in over two hundred separate statutes. It should encompass the full spectrum of NOAA's responsibilities, including programs to protect and restore the nation's fisheries, and its responsibilities to provide products that foster safe transportation on marine highways. The Administration plans to transmit a proposal for such legislation to Congress, and we are hopeful that the Members of this Committee will play an integral part in its passage. Most importantly, NOAA believes the agency must maintain its current flexibility in determining how best to structure itself to address current and future needs. In responding to the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy thus far, flexibility has proved to be a vital tool for NOAA leadership. An organizational structure that serves the nation well today may not be the best structure to serve the nation in the future. We believe that specific programmatic changes should be made through authorization bills that are revisited every few years. We would be happy to work with the Committee on such bills.

Legislative Priority — National Marine Sanctuaries Amendments Act

The *National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)* provides for the protection of nationally significant areas of the marine environment by designating them as national marine sanctuaries. The *NMSA* is unique among the suite of federal laws aimed at protecting or managing marine resources in that its primary objective is to set aside marine areas of special national significance for their protection and to conserve and manage them as ecosystems to maintain their natural biodiversity and historical and cultural heritage. Like National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges, sanctuaries are intended to endure for the benefit of current and future generations. One of our legislative priorities this Congress will be a *National Marine Sanctuaries Amendments Act*, which will update, strengthen, and clarify the *NMSA* to allow NOAA to be more effective and efficient in meeting its mandates.

Legislative Priority — Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Amendments Act

The *Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA)* established a national program to conduct activities to conserve coral reefs, leading to the creation of the NOAA Coral Reef

Conservation Program (CRCP). The *CRCA* authorizes NOAA to carry out a number of activities to promote the wise management and sustainable use of coral reef ecosystems, to develop sound scientific information on the condition of coral reef ecosystems, and to assist in the preservation of coral reefs by supporting external conservation programs. In the six years since its inception, the CRCP has worked to build capacity locally within U.S. coral jurisdictions and internationally in key areas: to map, monitor, characterize, restore, research, and assess the condition of coral reef ecosystems; provide management support; understand the threats to healthy coral reef ecosystems; and promote public awareness and education on the value of and threats to coral reef ecosystems. Another legislative priority for NOAA and our partners is the *Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Amendments Act*, which will improve the ability of NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program to better integrate and work more effectively with our partners in the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, including our co-chair the Department of the Interior, to provide the most effective and efficient protection of coral reef ecosystems.

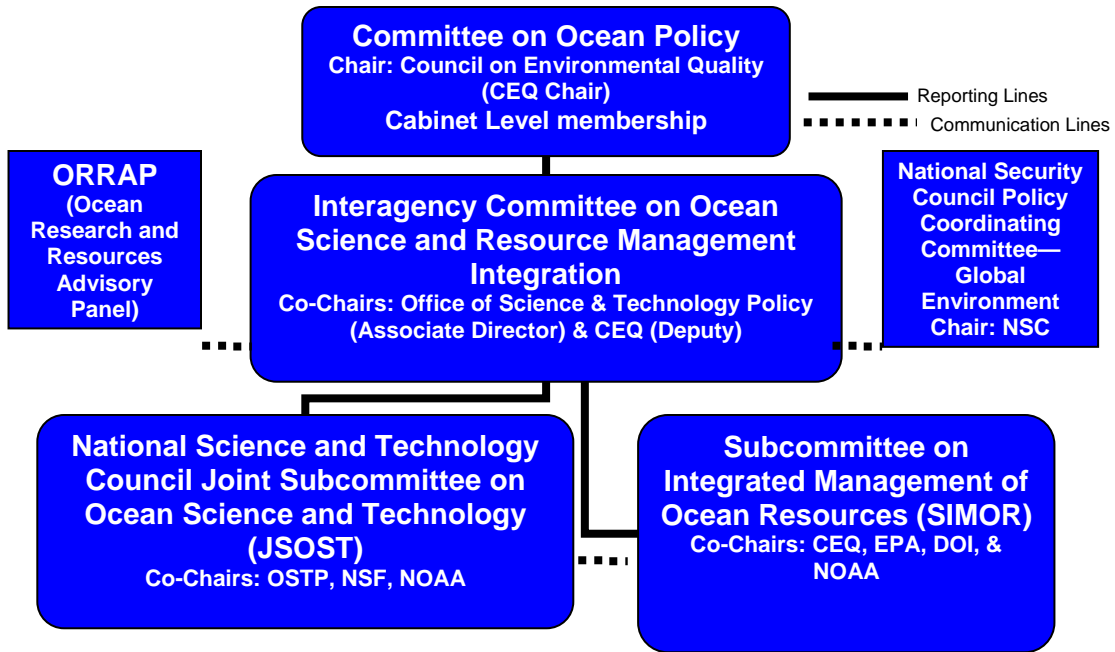
U.S. Ocean Action Plan — Enhancing Ocean Leadership and Coordination

Coordinated Ocean Governance Structure

The Committee on Ocean Policy conducts its operational work through the Interagency Committee on Ocean Science and Resource Management Integration (ICOSRMI) and its subordinate bodies, the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR) and the National Science and Technology Council's (NSTC) Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST). Within this new coordinated ocean governance structure (fig. 1), ICOSRMI is incorporating the mandate and functions of the National Oceanographic Partnership Program's National Ocean Research Leadership Council into its broader ocean and coastal policy mandate, which now includes ocean resource management. The purpose of a high-level group like the ICOSRMI is to provide oversight to the implementation of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, and direct further actions to advance ocean science and resource management activities. The ICOSRMI is comprised of Under/Assistant Secretaries or their equivalents from the executive branch agencies and departments of the Committee on Ocean Policy, and is co-chaired by the White House's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and Office of Science and Technology Policy. The White House involvement in this effort has been critical to providing the high-level guidance and support necessary to focus the group on achievable goals, and to maintain its momentum.

NOAA has taken a leadership role in both SIMOR and the JSOST, serving as co-chair on each respective group and further supporting their activities. SIMOR seeks to identify and promote opportunities for collaboration and cooperation among agencies on resource management issues, and to build partnerships among federal, state, tribal, and local authorities, the private sector, international partners, and other interested parties.

Fig. 1. Coordinated Ocean Governance Structure



SIMOR’s counterpart in the new coordinated ocean governance structure is the JSOST. The principal roles of JSOST are to identify national ocean science and technology priorities and to facilitate coordination of disciplinary and interdisciplinary ocean research, ocean technology and infrastructure development, and national ocean observation programs. The JSOST was created through expansion of the former NSTC’s Joint Subcommittee on Oceans in 2005 to include the issues of science and technology. Because of this evolution, the JSOST continues to report to the NSTC Committee on Science and the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, in addition to the ICOSRMI.

ICOSRMI seeks advice from its federal advisory committee, the Ocean Research and Resource Advisory Panel, comprised of 18 members from academia, as well as the public and private sectors, with interest and expertise in ocean science and resource management. ICOSRMI also coordinates with the National Security Council’s Global Environment Policy Coordinating Committee and its Subcommittee on Ocean Policy.

NOAA’s Implementation of the U.S. Ocean Action Plan

The tenets of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* include developing management strategies that ensure continued conservation of our ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes’ resources, while at the same time ensuring that the American public enjoys and benefits from them. It also includes employing the best science and data to inform decision-making; working toward an ecosystem-based approach to management, and, where possible, employing economic incentives over mandates.

CEQ designated NOAA as lead, or co-lead, on 45 items from the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. The diverse range of actions undertaken by NOAA to date include developing a status report on deep-sea corals in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, working jointly with EPA to conduct community workshops to improve watershed protection, and improving navigation by updating the National Water Level Observation Network. NOAA also continues to emphasize the importance of local and regional leadership in ocean management, co-leading with EPA the federal working group supporting the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, participating in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, and joining other SIMOR members in working with interested states to move forward to new regional initiatives such as the Northeast Regional Ocean Council. These regional bodies possess the unique ability to focus discussion on areas of most need, and provide lasting commitments to the stewardship of regional resources by those most affected by them.

In my view, progress on implementing the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* has been significant as highlighted below and NOAA will continue to work to enhance its partnerships in order to meet present and future challenges.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan — Advancing Our Understanding of the Oceans, Coasts, and Great Lakes

Ocean Research Priorities Plan

As outlined in the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, an important role of the JSOST within the interagency process is to improve our understanding of oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes by seeking enhanced collaboration, coordination, cooperation, and synergies. JSOST's recent efforts focused on developing an *Ocean Research Priorities Plan* and an *Implementation Strategy*. This plan provides strategic direction for future research and articulates priorities among competing demands for scientific information. These documents were prepared in an open and transparent manner with advice from the ocean research community (government, academic, industry, and other non-government entities), including SIMOR and the National Academy of Sciences. A national workshop with several hundred participants from academia, as well as the public and private sectors, convened in the spring of 2006 to solicit input, and a draft version of the documents was available to the public for review and comment from September 1-October 20, 2006. The plan, entitled *Charting the Course for Ocean Science in the United States for the Next Decade*, was released on January 26, 2007, and is now available at http://ocean.ceq.gov/about/sup_jsost_prioritiesplan.html.

NOAA has undertaken a number of other activities in partnership with external partners or other agencies to enhance our scientific knowledge of marine ecosystems. These have included a review of ecosystem science, integrating U.S. ocean observations, ocean and coastal mapping, coordinating ocean education, and hosting a conference on ocean literacy.

Integrating U.S. Ocean Observing Efforts

The *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* and the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy endorse implementation of a sustained Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). IOOS is the U.S. component of the Global Ocean Observing System, and is the key ocean component of the U.S. Integrated Earth Observation System (IEOS) now being developed. Both IOOS and IEOS will become part of GEOSS — the Global Earth Observation System of Systems. IOOS is envisioned as an interagency, end-to-end system designed to meet seven societal goals by integrating research, education, and the development of sustained ocean observing capabilities. The need to integrate data derives from NOAA's core missions. The challenges society faces today (coastal populations at risk, compromised ecosystems, climate change, increased maritime commerce) threaten jobs, revenue, and human health. Answers to these problems require access to better information. Developing IOOS is a top priority for NOAA. In December 2006, NOAA reconfirmed its commitment to IOOS by establishing an IOOS Program. The IOOS Program advances IOOS through improved organization, management, and focus. The new IOOS Program has two major functions:

- Project Management: including IOOS budget formulation, planning, and programming within NOAA's program structure; and
- Program Operations: includes IOOS office execution, outreach, and education.

The NOAA IOOS Program will not subsume other programs within NOAA, but rather coordinate and leverage capabilities found in NOAA in building the U.S. IOOS. The initial focus of the IOOS Program is to build an initial operating capability for IOOS. This will be accomplished by integrating five core IOOS variables (temperature, salinity, sea level, surface currents, and ocean color). The integration of these variables will be used in four priority NOAA models: coastal inundation, hurricane intensity, harmful algal bloom forecasts, and integrated ecosystem assessments. These models will be tested, evaluated and benchmarked for success in order to show the value of integration.

The IOOS Program will continue to support development of regional infrastructure and management to enable a fully configured and scalable U.S. IOOS. Ocean.US, the National Office for Integrated and Sustained Ocean Observations, has the lead for planning the multi-agency IOOS effort. NOAA is heavily involved in this planning, and has been designated by the Administration as the lead federal agency for administration and implementation of IOOS. Coordination between agencies continues to grow with the Interagency Working Group on Ocean Observations established under the JSOST and chaired by NOAA with vice chairs from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Navy, and the National Science Foundation (NSF).

Ocean and Coastal Mapping Activities

Improved information on our ocean and coastal areas is essential to improved management and advances in ocean and coastal management and science. NOAA is working with its interagency partners to advance our nation's capabilities in this area, taking advantage of technologies such as LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and autonomous underwater vehicles. Among its efforts, NOAA is working to ensure the most effective use of our fleet of vessels and aircraft by integrating our multiple program mapping requirements, developing new techniques for data acquisition, working with

other agencies, and making seamless the use of our mapping missions. We are building a Geographic Information System support tool to be able to better plan and integrate mapping efforts in order to narrow the gaps between current program mapping capability, and a modern fully integrated ocean mapping system. The goal is to meet the broadest range of program needs and eliminate duplicative efforts in NOAA's ocean and coastal mapping activities. In addition, NOAA is working with other agencies to develop an inventory of coastal and ocean mapping programs, their existing data, and planned acquisitions, along with a web-based system to search and display records from the inventory. The FY 2008 Budget Request includes \$8 million for NOAA — in conjunction with our interagency partners — to define the outer limits of the U.S. continental shelf (areas beyond 200 miles from the U.S. coast that meet certain geological criteria). Defining those limits will allow the U.S. to confirm its resource rights, which contain an estimated \$1.2 trillion worth of resources.

Increased Ocean Education Coordination

Together, SIMOR and the JSOST have formed the joint Interagency Working Group on Ocean Education, to identify opportunities and articulate priorities for enhancing ocean education, outreach, and capacity building. Ocean management is more effective with an ocean literate public and to this end NOAA leverages many opportunities to advance ocean education in support of its mission goals. Our formal and informal activities include scholarship and fellowship programs, education and research grants, and strategic partnerships with education institutions and industry. In 2006, NOAA's Education Office provided scholarship and internship opportunities to over 230 undergraduate students. NOAA's education investment is also geared towards hiring students trained through these scholarship and internship opportunities. Through December 31, 2006, NOAA has hired 32 students trained through its Graduate Sciences Program. Also in 2006, 33 teachers participated in NOAA's Teacher at Sea Program.

To raise national attention to the need for ocean literacy, NOAA, with EPA, the Department of the Interior (DOI), NSF, NASA, and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, co-hosted CoOI — the Conference on Ocean Literacy — on June 7-8, 2006, in Washington, D.C., as part of the presidentially proclaimed National Oceans Week, June 4-10. The conference brought together key participants to discuss the essential principles of ocean literacy, and the current challenges and opportunities for both formal and informal education efforts in educating the public to make informed, responsible decisions about the ocean and its resources. This partnership event also identified priority next steps we can take to advance ocean literacy. The conference extended beyond Washington, D.C., through five regional workshops hosted by aquariums across the country including: Aquarium of the Pacific, Long Beach, CA; John G. Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, IL; J.L. Scott Aquarium, Ocean Springs, MS; National Aquarium in Baltimore, Baltimore, MD; and National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, Dubuque, IA. Each site viewed portions of the presentations via satellite and discussed regional challenges and opportunities for promoting ocean literacy principles.

Implementing the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research Control Act

Highlighted in the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, the *Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia*

Amendments Act of 2004 (HABHRCA) reaffirmed and expanded the mandate for NOAA to address harmful algal blooms (HABs) and hypoxia. HABs and hypoxia are two of the most scientifically complex and economically significant coastal issues facing our nation today. NOAA, in collaboration with federal, state, and academic partners, is helping coastal managers lessen or prevent the detrimental effects of these phenomena on human health and on valuable coastal resources. *HABHRCA* supported research was critical in helping coastal communities in the Gulf of Maine and Florida mitigate the damage of historic blooms in 2006 and ongoing research promises major advancements in other regions such as the Pacific Northwest and Great Lakes. *HABHRCA* research activities are also providing the foundation for NOAA's efforts to develop an operational HAB forecast system around the U.S. coast.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan — Enhancing the Use and Conservation of Ocean, Coastal, and Great Lakes Resources

SIMOR Work Plan

Established as part of the Committee on Ocean Policy, SIMOR provides a strong mechanism to coordinate federal activities and respond to regional concerns, and is jointly co-chaired by NOAA, EPA, DOI, and CEQ. It has fostered mutual interest and proactive dialog among agencies in addressing difficult resource management issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries. SIMOR has developed a *Work Plan* with 21 actions in four priority areas that build on the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. NOAA has a leadership role in 12 of these actions and participates in nearly all of the others. Examples of the benefits of SIMOR activities include: improved understanding of an ecosystem approach to management through regional workshops; development of educational standards for resource managers; coordinated federal support to new and ongoing regional partnerships; formation of a federal/state team of resource managers to provide timely input into the JSOST's development of the *Ocean Research Priorities Plan*.

Implementing Coral Reef Local Action Strategies

The federal agencies, freely associated states, and seven jurisdictions (Florida, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands) that comprise the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force have developed and begun implementing *Coral Reef Local Action Strategies* to address key threats to coral reefs in their respective jurisdictions. The *Strategies* provide a framework for Task Force member agencies to identify, and collaboratively address, these threats and additional local needs, connect local priorities to national goals, and coordinate federal agency actions with local management of reef resources. This effort is a significant step forward in advancing the goal of cooperative conservation between the federal, state, territorial, and commonwealth governments. NOAA, DOI, EPA, and the Department of Agriculture have been key partners in implementing the action strategy effort and building local capacity for coral reef conservation and management. For example, agencies organized a successful Caribbean Coral Reef Grants and Funding Opportunities Workshop in August 2005 to help island jurisdictions and local partners identify and pursue funding opportunities for local action strategy support. Additional

Coral Reef Grants Funding Workshops were held in June and July of 2006 in Hawaii, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. A final workshop is being planned for American Samoa in August or September 2007.

Implementing the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

A bill reauthorizing the *Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA)* was signed by the President on January 12, 2007. The *MSA* strengthens a number of key fisheries management provisions. Two primary goals of the *MSA* – ending overfishing and increasing the use of dedicated access and limited access privilege programs – are hallmark positions of the Administration and were embodied in the President’s *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* and elsewhere. The *MSA* includes several hundred specific tasks and meets a number of Administration commitments in the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. The National Marine Fisheries Service is currently finalizing a detailed tracking and implementation plan for the new *MSA*. Implementation teams will be developed to address specific provisions or related sets of requirements. Successful implementation will require extensive interaction with our constituents and interagency partners.

Designation of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

Recognizing the continuing need for resource protection, President Bush designated the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a marine national monument on June 15, 2006. Encompassing nearly 140,000 square miles, this monument is more than 100 times larger than Yosemite National Park, larger than 46 of our 50 states, and more than seven times larger than all our national marine sanctuaries combined. The designation builds upon the public sanctuary designation process, the State of Hawaii’s Marine Refuge, and the National Wildlife Refuge System’s 98-year presence here to provide lasting protection to this important resource. The creation of the largest fully-protected marine conservation area in the world is an exciting achievement and recognizes the value of marine resources to our nation.

On March 2, 2007, First Lady Laura Bush joined Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne, U.S. Department of Commerce Deputy Secretary David Sampson, and James Connaughton, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality in announcing the new Hawaiian name for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument. The name is Papahānaumokuākea, which refers to Hawaiian genealogy and the formation of the Hawaiian archipelago.

For the first time in its history, NOAA is a partner in managing a national monument. This is an exciting opportunity and one that will present many challenges. Thankfully, we have great partners in DOI and the State of Hawaii to help us co-manage this unique area.

I think President Bush said it best: “You know, in America, there’s a great consensus that we have an obligation to be good stewards of the environment. Success of a generation is not defined by wealth alone. We also will be measured by the respect we give to the precious creatures of our natural world. We have great choices before us in this country.

And with the designation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Island Marine National Monument, we are making a choice that will leave a precious legacy.”

Coordinating and Integrating the Existing Network of Marine Managed Areas

Two national initiatives are currently working to enhance coordination among existing marine protected areas (MPAs) programs in the U.S. in order to improve their efficiency and effectiveness in protecting the nation’s natural and cultural marine resources. These two efforts are the development of the national system of MPAs, led by NOAA’s MPA Center, and the creation of a “Seamless Network” among three federal and one federal/state partnership MPA programs. While each initiative has its own distinct goals, the efforts complement one another and we are working together to ensure coordination. The *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* calls on National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, National Marine Sanctuaries, and National Estuarine Research Reserves to promote coordination of research, public education, and management activities at neighboring parks, refuges, sanctuaries, and estuarine reserves. Many of these sites overlap or lie adjacent to each other, and have a history of collaboration that provides a model for this expanded network. Although these sites were created under separate agency authorities and statutory mandates, they are united by their proximity and similar science and management priorities. These actions to coordinate and better integrate are referred to as the “Seamless Network” initiative. Two federal interagency agreements will help implement this effort. The first is a general agreement signed in August 2006 that enables site-based, regional, and national collaborations among the partner agencies, and is currently being implemented. The second is a separate cooperative law enforcement agreement signed in August 2005 between the National Wildlife Refuge System, National Park Service, National Marine Sanctuary Program and National Marine Fisheries Service.

As an example of the “Seamless Network” initiative, a partnership among DOI, the State of Florida, and NOAA’s Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary focuses on the management of the Dry Tortugas in the Florida Keys, and creating a unique management plan that balances conservation, research and recreational use. The Dry Tortugas National Park has established a no-take marine reserve in the park, while leaving more than half the park open to recreational fishing. The reserve, called a Research Natural Area, is 46 nm² set aside to protect a pristine area, provide a sanctuary for species that have been affected by harvest or habitat degradation, and foster scientific research. The reserve will also offer outstanding opportunities for non-consumptive recreation and education.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan — Managing Coasts and Their Watersheds

Gulf of Mexico Alliance

One example of SIMOR’s role in enhancing coordination on managing coasts and watersheds is providing an integrated federal response to support the state-led Gulf of Mexico Alliance, a regional partnership of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The Alliance formally released the *Governors’ Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts* at the Gulf of Mexico Summit in March 2006, which

includes 11 key actions — detailed by 73 specific steps — across the Alliance's five priority issues: water quality, restoration, environmental education, habitat identification for management purposes, and reductions in nutrient loadings. In order to capture local community input during the development of the *Governors' Action Plan*, the Gulf Alliance hosted a series of eight Community Workshops across the five Gulf States from June 2005 to February 2006. SIMOR brought together 13 federal agencies, led by NOAA and EPA, to respond to regional priorities articulated by the states in the *Governors' Action Plan*. Collaborating state and federal agencies have already produced several tangible outcomes as called for in the *Governors' Action Plan*, and have committed to continue working together on these regional priorities. Some of the expected outcomes from this effort are healthier beaches and shellfish beds; restoration and conservation of Gulf coastal wetlands; and a regional environmental education campaign.

Cooperative Conservation Executive Order

The Administration remains committed to the tenets of Cooperative Conservation, as outlined in the Executive Order from 2004. In 2005, at the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation, NOAA announced a new grants program to aid communities in removing small obstructions to their rivers. The goal of the Open Rivers Initiative (ORI) is to not only improve habitat for diadromous fish populations, but also foster new economic development opportunities. In addition to ORI, NOAA will continue to find new and innovative ways to advance Cooperative Conservation throughout the agency. On June 26, 2006, the White House hosted top Administration officials, including Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator Conrad Lautenbacher, and conservation leaders to discuss concepts for proposed cooperative conservation legislation. The meeting brought the cabinet members together with approximately 50 representatives of organizations that attended the 2005 White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation in St. Louis, Missouri. Participants included conservationists, public land users, ranchers, farmers and others.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan — Supporting Marine Transportation

Interagency Committee on the Marine Transportation System

Consistent with the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* called for strengthening the previous federal interagency marine transportation effort — the Interagency Committee on the Marine Transportation System — and directed the creation of a Cabinet-level interagency committee on marine transportation. As a result the Committee on the Marine Transportation System (CMTS), chaired by the Secretary of Transportation with membership from 14 other federal agencies, was established in April 2005. I am proud to say that the Department of Commerce, with strong representation by NOAA, is a charter member of the CMTS, and actively supports its mission. NOAA currently chairs the Coordinating Board, which is the chief policy advisory board to the CMTS. The purpose of the CMTS is to promote a partnership of federal agencies with responsibility for the Marine Transportation System (MTS) — waterways, ports, and their intermodal connections — to ensure the

development and implementation of national MTS policies, and to communicate to the President its views and recommendations for improving the MTS.

The CMTS is executing a work plan that will provide a comprehensive assessment of the MTS; development of an MTS national strategy; improved collection and management of MTS data; and development of a decision making matrix for improved coordination and response to natural disasters affecting the nation's MTS.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan — Advancing International Ocean Policy and Science

Advancing the Use of Large Marine Ecosystems

The *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* included a chapter on implementing international efforts. Several of the action items in the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* include international components. However, as many of today's challenges to our oceans and coasts are transboundary and international in nature and scope, the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* also includes a section that addresses the advancement of international ocean policy and science. One example of these efforts is a recent partnership that has been developed to link the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Seas Programme and the use of the NOAA-originated concept of Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs). This partnership facilitates the management of an ecosystem that crosses national boundaries. This effort has attracted funding from the Global Environmental Facility and various donor countries, specifically focusing on capacity building in the developing world. NOAA has contributed in-kind technical expertise to assist the planning and implementation of the related programs.

Protecting Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems from Destructive Fishing Practices

The United States has taken significant steps to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), including seamounts, hydrothermal vents, and cold-water corals, from destructive fishing practices within our domestic waters. For example, in July 2006, NOAA established the Aleutian Islands Habitat Conservation Area, more than 950,000 km² in size, protecting deep corals, sponges and other sensitive features that are slow to recover from disturbance. The United States is a leader in promoting the need for similar conservation and management measures internationally, through various forums including the United Nations (UN) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In October 2006, President Bush issued a memorandum to Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez, which promoted the sustainable management of global fisheries resources and called for an end to destructive fishing practices on the high seas. The U.S. delegation to the 2006 UN General Assembly fisheries resolution negotiations promoted the position as outlined in the Presidential Memo, specifically urging nations to prohibit their vessels from engaging in destructive fishing practices on the high seas until applicable conservation and management measures, or a Regional Fisheries management Organization (RFMO), are in place. The ultimate consensus-based language of the resolution includes management provisions for not RFMOs and States to prevent bottom fishing from causing harm to VMEs and calls upon the FAO for further management

guidance. At the recent session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries, held March 5-9, 2007 in Rome, Italy, a major topic of discussion was the role of the FAO in implementing the UN General Assembly resolution. Among the requests made of FAO, a priority for the U.S. was the development of standards and criteria for use by States and RFMOs in identifying VMEs and the impacts of fishing on such ecosystems. As a result, the FAO plans to develop technical guidelines for the management of deep sea fisheries on the high seas by early 2008.

2008 Budget Priorities

The President's Budget for FY 2008 includes a \$143 million for NOAA, DOI, and NSF to support the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, and to build on the successes in implementing the *Plan* thus far. Of the \$143 million total, \$123 million in increases is requested for NOAA oceans programs. NOAA's portion of this initiative includes \$38 million to protect and restore marine and coastal areas, including \$8 million for enforcement and management activities in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Also in this request is \$25 million to ensure sustainable use of ocean resources, including \$6.5 million to implement the new and expanded requirements of the *Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act*. Lastly, this oceans initiative dedicates \$60 million to advance ocean science and research, which includes \$16 million for IOOS. The components of the request will allow NOAA to further the responsible use and stewardship of ocean and coastal resources as identified in the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*.

The overall FY 2008 President's Budget for NOAA supports NOAA's priority to advance mission-critical services and is \$3.815 billion, which represents a \$131 million or 3.4% increase over the FY 2007 request.

NOAA and its partner agencies appreciate your continued support for our programs as we execute our responsibilities under the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* and work together to improve our products and services for the American people. These resources are vital to meeting the challenges facing our nation's oceans.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance of the efforts of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, and stress that NOAA is strongly committed to continued implementation of the related recommendations of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. NOAA will continue to work with its partners in a collaborative and systematic fashion, as we believe collaboration is critical to make our ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes cleaner, healthier and more productive. We look forward to continuing to work with the Members of the Committee in raising the bar for the long-term conservation and management of our coastal and ocean resources.

Thank you again for your time and I am happy to answer any questions that the Members of the Committee may have.