

**Remarks before the
EPA Gulf of Mexico Program – Policy Review Board
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**By
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Good morning and thank you for the invitation to participate in this EPA Gulf of Mexico Program Joint Policy Review Board/Management Committee meeting. As a resident of Florida, I have a very special personal and professional interest in the Gulf of Mexico Program, as well as in the future of our nation's ocean policy.

As you know, I am a member of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and I'd like to tell you a little bit about where we are in our process.

As we enter the 21st century, it is clear that human activities adversely impact the environment if we don't manage these activities in a sustainable manner. The cumulative effects of our actions threaten the sustainable use of the oceans and coasts. We have already lost potential sources of food, areas of recreation, and wetlands that keep our water clean, and in many cases we have paid dearly with degraded water quality, lost jobs, increased health care costs, and decreased revenue.

Despite all this, we are also at a time of unprecedented opportunity. Today, as never before, we have learned to understand the Earth, oceans, and human life within the context of an interconnected system. We also have access to advanced technology and to timely, high-quality scientific information. The stage is set for us to alter our course and set sail toward a new vision, one where the ocean is healthy and productive and our use of marine resources is sustained and economically bountiful.

It is your role to help implement policies that lead us in that direction. I hope, therefore, that the findings of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy will help you carry out that critical role.

As you know, the last comprehensive review of our nation's ocean policies was done almost 35 years ago by the Stratton Commission. The Stratton Report led to such things as the creation of NOAA, the Coastal Zone Management Act, and several other major pieces of legislation.

The Oceans Act of 2000 mandated the creation of a new U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy to study the state of our ocean knowledge and governance, and to recommend a national ocean policy. The law states that this process is to give equal consideration to environmental, technical feasibility, economic, and scientific factors in developing our recommendations. In September 2001, the new Commission embarked on what became 15 public meetings and additional site visits around the country. Through expert testimony and many excellent presentations by leaders in every field related to marine research, science, and policy, the Commission learned first-hand about the most pressing issues facing the nation regarding use and stewardship of ocean and coastal resources. The Commission plans to make public its *Preliminary Draft Report* on April 20.

In parallel to the process I just outlined, the Pew Oceans Commission carried out its own assessments. This privately-funded group of dedicated individuals published its findings in June 2003. A natural question is how the recommendations from the new U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy compare and contrast with those from Pew Oceans Commission. The Pew oceans report highlights problems in the way we manage living resources and makes important recommendations for significant change in ocean governance and in management approaches. Our own Commission used the many documents generated by the Pew Oceans Commission as input to our own study.

In my opinion, both commissions' findings are essentially the same. We agree on the problems and in many of the recommendations. But if you get bogged down comparing the commissions, you're missing the point. The point is that the oceans are in trouble and we need to make changes.

With regards to our own report, although I cannot discuss specific recommendations, I would like to give you a flavor of Commission's position with regards the various topics slated for discussion today:

Based on our fact-finding and deliberation, all 16 Commissioners agree that the U.S. desperately needs a new integrated management mechanism to treat ocean resources as interrelated and interdependent ecosystem components, rather than as a collection of isolated fragments managed independently from each other, as practiced today. The current insular and disjointed policy approach has led to confusion and contradiction and must be changed.

- **Ocean Governance:** The Commission will recommend a National Ocean Policy Framework that creates a more effective and coordinated federal management system, with strong high-level leadership, strengthened and improved agency performance, and greater opportunity for regional participation. A core element is the creation of a National Ocean Council, housed within the Executive Office of the President. It would be chaired by an independent Assistant to the President for Ocean Policy, and would be integrated by the President's relevant cabinet members and directors of independent agencies.

As a second element of the new National Ocean Policy framework, the existing federal structure will need to be strengthened to be more effective, less redundant, and better suited to a balanced ecosystem-based, management approach.

Third, it is equally important to give local, regional, tribal and state organizations a more active and effective role in managing the nation's oceans and coasts. The Commission will recommend strengthening regional management and participation.

The Commission will propose solutions that transcend political boundaries and emphasize the need to move toward an ecosystem-based management approach. We recognize that one cannot call for ecosystem-based management without recognizing the clear linkages among the oceans, the atmosphere, the land, and the human activities that take place across these areas. Ocean management has to be tied to land management, for example.

- **Science, Technology, and Engineering:** Effective ocean policy should be based on unbiased, credible and sufficient scientific information; this requires significant investment, an adequate infrastructure, a system for data collection and management, and the means to effectively translate science into useful and timely products. The federal investment in ocean research has been stagnant or decreasing. It has fallen from seven percent of the federal research budget 25 years ago to less than four percent today. This is not good. Management in ignorance is not acceptable. So, we are recommending significant attention be put in reviving our research and technology infrastructure. A high priority is to implement an Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) based on a backbone of coordinated, linked regional monitoring systems and strong connections to the Global Ocean Observing System. This is a system which I hope the EPA will help implement and use.
- **Education:** The Commission supports a national ocean policy founded on high-quality, effective ocean education that promotes lifelong learning, an adequate and diverse workforce, informed decision making, science

literacy, and stewardship. All of the ocean-related agencies should be required to take responsibility for promoting education and outreach related to their missions. Lifelong education efforts need to be improved so that every individual recognizes the value of the ocean to their own lives and how their actions affect the marine environment. We need an informed public that upholds and promotes a national stewardship ethic.

- **Pollution:** The Commission examines several aspects of pollution in great depth. We will make specific recommendations on coastal water pollution, vessel pollution, sediment management, marine debris, and other issues such as invasive species. The protection of coastal waters will require managers to actively address a variety of pollutants, pathways, and a range of human activities that generate pollution. An ecosystem and watershed-based management approach, which includes modernization of treatment facilities and conservation, will be required. This will be most effective if guided by the new governance framework we are recommending.
- **Coral Reefs:** Our report will highlight the astounding decline of coral reef ecosystems in both the United States and around the world. We will stress that the time for focusing only on studying the problem is over; there is an urgent need to address the identified, major factors causing coral declines, such as elevated sea temperatures caused by global climate change, direct and indirect impacts of fishing, and land-based pollution.
- **Marine Protected Areas:** The Commission recognizes that that marine protected areas are an important and useful management tool that promote healthy oceans by purposefully managing portions of ecosystems. We recognize the significant problem of confusion with the term MPA, because it seems to have become a catch-all phrase that, to

many people, means locking an area away forever. We therefore find a need for clear definition of the substantial range of possible ways to implement MPAs. We believe that the development of MPAs must be based on good scientific information, when possible come from a bottom-up process starting at the local level, and that state and local citizens must be engaged in the development process.

- **International Issues:** The Commission recognizes that this is an important dimension and we will make recommendations urging the U.S. to lead the way in promoting better practices worldwide by ratifying the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. We as a nation also need to define a useful path to follow with other processes, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Although these are just a few of the issues we address in the report, I hope you see that we are striking a good balance. I am confident that our report will be a blueprint for action using ecosystem-based management as the organizing framework for improvements in governance, in science, and in education.

Please stay tuned. Our Preliminary Draft report will be released within a few weeks. I want to stress that this is not the final report – it is a preliminary report being circulated for review and comment by the nation’s governors, Congress and the public, as mandated by the law. The availability of the preliminary report on the Commission’s website will be announced in the Federal Register. After receiving comments from the governors and the public, we will adjust our Preliminary Draft document as we deem appropriate to prepare the final report for the President and the Congress. The President is to respond to our report within 90 days. Our Commission will remain active during that response period.

I ask that each and every one of us, this means all of you, become engaged in examining this report. You may not agree with all of our recommendations or you

may think some particular area did not receive adequate treatment. That is understandable and inevitable, but it should not prevent you from supporting the creation of a comprehensive and coordinated national ocean policy.

High tides raise all boats. It is our collective task to make sure everyone understands that the oceans are both a public resource and a public trust, and that conservation for future generations is critical for our survival on Earth. This can only be done by working together.

Thank you.