



National Association of Marine Laboratories

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November 26, 2007

The Honorable Madeleine Bordallo
Chair, Subcommittee on Fisheries,
Wildlife and Oceans
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sam Farr
Member, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Bordallo & Congressman Farr:

On behalf of the National Association of Marine Laboratories (NAML), I am writing to comment on the newest draft of the Oceans Conservation, Education, and National Strategy for the 21st Century Act (OCEANS-21), which was circulated for comment a few weeks ago. NAML provided comment on the original draft of HR 21 back in the summer and called for the immediate consideration of the bill by the Natural Resources and Science and Technology Committees. I would like to take this opportunity to commend you for your continued work to fine-tune the bill into a piece of legislation that can ensure that the U.S. is working toward positive change for our oceans in the future. Let me address the draft according to title:

Title I – National Ocean Governance. Again, we are pleased that the new draft would codify the Committee on Ocean Policy (which was originally created by Executive Order 13366 in 2004), a major recommendation of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative (JOCI). The establishment of a Cabinet-level National Ocean Advisor and a Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy elevate ocean issues to the level of importance at the national level which it deserves. Further, NAML is encouraged that among the membership of the Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy are representatives from the marine science research and education communities. However, NAML encourages you to also consider creating a mechanism along the lines of an advisory committee to the Council to create a process by which the non-federal ocean research and education community can provide input and advice to the Council and the participating agencies.

Title II – NOAA Organic Act. An organic act for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is essential to the continued modernization of the agency. NAML believes the new draft more accurately clarifies the specific overarching responsibilities of NOAA. NAML is also pleased that the new language provides a broader perspective with respect to NOAA's functions and role in and oversight of issues pertaining to resource management. As the "lead ocean agency," NOAA has an obvious role to play in management, research, education, and technology development as they relate to the oceans and this version of the bill will give NOAA the direction it needs to effectively address its mission.

The National Association of Marine Laboratories (NAML) is a nonprofit organization of over 120 member institutions representing coastal, marine, and Great Lakes laboratories in every coastal state, stretching from Guam to Bermuda and Alaska to Puerto Rico. Members serve as unique "windows on the sea," providing information on the rich environmental mosaic of coastal habitats as well as offshore oceanic regions and the Great Lakes. NAML member laboratories conduct research and provide a variety of academic, education and public service programs to enable local and regional communities to better understand and manage the ocean, coastal and Great Lake environments. NAML is comprised of three regional associations: the Northeastern Association of Marine and Great Lakes Laboratories (NEAMGLL); the Southern Association of Marine Laboratories (SAML); and the Western Association of Marine Laboratories (WAML).

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There is one particular provision in the original version of the bill that NAML would recommend be reinstated into the new draft – that is the provision that codifies the NOAA Office of Education. Education is a cornerstone to NAML’s activities and we believe that an ocean literate populace makes a well-informed and safe nation. NAML regularly works with the relevant Federal agencies to strengthen and enhance ocean, coastal and Great Lakes education, literacy and outreach. NAML laboratories provide a unique training ground that is conducive to on-the-job learning and mentoring. Marine labs are also committed to enhancing diversity within the field of ocean, coastal and Great Lakes research and education by fostering relationships with community colleges and minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Making it clear that NOAA has an education function in the organic act would be very useful for the agency and the external community.

The ability of NOAA to execute its mission and effectively manage its resources could be dramatically improved by a concerted effort to engage with the extramural or non-federal research community. NOAA has often stated its intention to increase its support for extramural research but often the reality falls short of the agency’s stated intentions. In 2004, the Research Review Team said:

“Extramural research is critical to accomplishing NOAA’s mission. NOAA benefits from extramural research in many ways, including:

- World class expertise not found in NOAA laboratories;
- Connectivity with planning and conduct of global sciences;
- Means to leverage external funding sources;
- Facilitate multi-institution cooperation;
- Access to vast and unique research facilities; and
- Access to graduate and undergraduate students.”

NAML strongly suggests that the organic act contain a section that provides an explicit framework or mandate for increased support for competitive, peer-reviewed research grants for non-federal researchers – i.e. universities and non-federal research laboratories. Examples of successful extramural research programs at NOAA include the National Sea Grant College Program, the National Undersea Research Program, and the U.S. Climate Change Science Program. While these programs are examples of how NOAA can partner with the extramural research community to execute the agency’s mission, NOAA could take better advantage of the wealth of knowledge and expertise available via the nation’s research laboratories and universities. We respectfully suggest that the organic act make competitive, merit-based extramural research a vital part of this legislation.

Title III – Regional Coordination and Planning. NAML is a diverse organization that spans the United States from the Pacific to Atlantic Oceans, Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. As the on-the-ground source for ocean knowledge, marine labs are sensitive to the issues affecting our regions. We are encouraged by the regional approach set forth in the bill and the establishment of a Regional Ocean Partnership for each identified region. However, we encourage you to include in the membership of these partnerships a representative(s) from non-federal marine labs and marine research institutions. We feel that the original version of the bill included these individuals through the establishment of a Citizens Advisory Committee which would be comprised of “non-governmental members of the public, including a wide range of citizens interested in multiple uses of United States ocean waters and ocean resources.” While the new draft states that each partnership may establish advisory committees or working groups as needed, we suggest the legislation should explicitly include the non-federal research community as an active participant.

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Title IV – Authorization of Appropriations and Establishment of Trust Fund. Finally, we are extremely supportive of Title IV of the bill which would create an Ocean and Great Lakes Conservation Trust Fund to fund the many important actions within this bill. The development of such a fund has been a recommendation of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative and would ensure that the U.S. is able to support and regularly enhance its investments in our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes and their resources. We hope that if this bill is enacted, it will result in annual appropriations along the lines of those recommended by the Joint Ocean Commission.

NAML would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide these thoughts on the legislation. If we can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or Mr. Joel Widder at the information printed on this letterhead.

Sincerely,



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NAML

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