

For Immediate Release
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An SOS for the Oceans

Admiral James D. Watkins Commends Gulf of Mexico Alliance's "Governors' Ocean Action Plan"

Urges States, Regions to Continue Efforts and Demand for More Rapid Progress on Ocean Policy Reform at a National Level

Corpus Christi, TX--- Our nation must implement a long-term national strategy to protect, maintain and restore the nation's and the Gulf Region's oceans and coasts while recognizing the impact this key resource has on our economy as demonstrated by last year's devastating hurricane season.

This message was sent today by Admiral James D. Watkins, co-chair of the bipartisan Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, during his speech at the State of the Gulf Mexico Summit. The Initiative was formed by members of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission to encourage the nation to act swiftly on ocean policy reform.

Earlier this year, the Initiative issued a U.S. Ocean Policy Report Card that graded the nation's collective progress toward carrying out the recommendations in the two Commissions' reports. While the Report Card recognized some efforts by the Administration, Congress, and a number of coastal states, it expressed serious concern about the disappointingly slow rate of progress and gave an overall grade of D+.

"Action is needed now -- to implement a national strategy to protect, maintain and restore the nation's and Gulf Region's priceless economic and ecological assets -- our oceans and coasts," said Watkins. "Our Report Card was designed to provide an up-to-date baseline on the critical challenges still facing our oceans and identify the many opportunities ripe for action."

"Governors Perry, Bush, Riley, Barbour, and Blanco should be praised for establishment of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance and their 'Governors' Action Plan' released today," Watkins continued. "Their collaboration and work can stand as a model for how we need to bring together all ocean and coastal stakeholders -- users, conservers, managers and regulators -- to develop effective management of our oceans, coasts, and their resources."

Watkins addressed increasing pressure, underscored by last year's devastating hurricanes, on our oceans, coasts, and their resources as populations and poorly planned development rise along the coasts. He also

pointed to the problems of over-fishing depleting the world's fisheries, red tides impacting the health of marine species and humans, and runoff polluting our coastal waters.

"Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and other storms that have ravaged this region of the country demonstrated the increasing vulnerability of people and property to storms and storm surges," said Watkins. "The silver lining of this experience is a new awareness, nationwide, of the economic, social, and ecological value of the coastal communities and renewed commitment to reforming ocean-related policies to minimize the impacts of future storms and optimize the benefits of coastal resources provide our nation."

Watkins also emphasized the importance of integrating efforts across state and national boundaries as crucial to the success of dealing with the problems plaguing the Gulf and all coastal waters. He called upon states and regions to drive the reform process forward at a national level.

"One of the major hurdles hampering progress is the lack of action at the national level," said Watkins. "The only way ocean policy reform will occur at this level is if it is driven by demands from local, state, and regional stakeholders."

"We are at a crucial crossroad regarding whether we'll move into an enlightened period for ocean policy," Watkins concluded. "Congress and the Administration in concert with coastal Governors, need to be inspired to recognize that they have a unique opportunity to chart a new course in ocean management, a course that will help lay the foundation for a new generation of environmental management in better harmony with nature."

The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform. The Initiative will realize this goal by tapping into and working closely with networks of people involved in local, state, and regional ocean issues, thereby facilitating progress in the regions while building durable support for the Initiative's national priorities. The Initiative also will pursue movement on select national ocean policy issues based on the Commissions' core priorities.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is uniquely positioned to accelerate the pace of positive change. The Commissioners involved bring extraordinary expertise, perspective, relationships, and diversity of interest to ocean and coastal policy reform. This foundation can serve as the basis for a greatly expanded understanding of the critical issues facing our oceans and action at regional and national levels to address these problems.

For more information please visit www.jointoceancommission.org