

**For Immediate Release**  
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## Governors Act to Protect Oceans

### The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Commends West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health

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

Long Beach, CA—The nation must implement a long-term national strategy to protect, maintain, and restore its oceans and coasts, while recognizing the impact these key resources have on the economy, here on the West Coast and nationwide, according to the Honorable Leon E. Panetta in a speech he delivered to the California and the World Ocean '06 Conference in Long Beach, CA.

Panetta, who chaired the Pew Oceans Commission, was speaking on behalf of the bipartisan Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, which he co-chairs with Admiral James Watkins (Ret.), the chairman of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. The objective of the Joint Initiative, which includes all members of both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission, is to encourage the nation to act swiftly on ocean policy reform.

“Admiral Watkins, myself, and the entire Joint Ocean Commission Initiative commend Governors Schwarzenegger, Gregoire, and Kulongoski for the establishment of the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health,” Panetta continued. “This innovative collaboration stands as a model for how to bring together all ocean and coastal stakeholders—users, managers, scientists, and others—to effectively manage our oceans, coasts, and their resources.”

Earlier this year, the Joint Initiative issued *From Sea to Shining Sea: Priorities for Ocean Policy Reform*, developed at the request of a bipartisan group of ten U.S. Senators to identify the most urgent priorities for congressional action to protect, restore, and maintain the marine ecosystem. The report includes the top ten steps Congress should take to address the most pressing challenges, the highest funding priorities, and the most important changes to federal law and the budget process to establish a more effective and integrated ocean policy.

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“Three years ago the Pew Oceans Commission and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy sounded the alarm on the state of our oceans,” said Panetta. “While we did a good job helping everyone understand that oceans and coasts are in serious trouble, we are having difficulty transforming that insight into sustained momentum to achieve a new framework for ocean policy.”

Panetta highlighted increasing threats to our oceans, coasts, and their resources as population pressures and poorly planned development rise along the coasts. He 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.

“We must be more aggressive if we hope to repair and protect the oceans and coasts, which we depend on for our national security, economic security, food security, recreation, and environmental health,” Panetta said. “It’s no overstatement to say that oceans are essential to human survival. They are responsible for the air we breathe and support a significant portion of our economy. Yet we continue to erode their capacity to sustain life and compromise their ability to provide goods and services we rely upon.”

In praising the Governors’ agreement, Panetta emphasized that collaborative regional approaches are crucial to successfully managing the problems plaguing our nation’s coastal waters. He called upon states and regions to follow the lead of the West Coast Governors and 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 Panetta. “The only way ocean policy reform will be addressed by our nation’s leaders is if it is driven by demands from local, state, and regional stakeholders. The Governors’ coordinated collaboration demonstrates a serious commitment and investment to address critical ocean and coastal management issues that other state, regional, and national leaders should follow.”

“We are at a crucial crossroad regarding whether we’ll move into an enlightened period for ocean policy,” Panetta concluded. “Congress and the Administration, in concert with coastal Governors, need 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 that recognizes the substantial economic benefits generated by a healthy ocean ecosystem.”

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission. The Initiative is guided by a ten-member Task Force, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins (Ret.) and the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, chairs of the U.S. Commission and Pew Commission, respectively. The goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform. For more information please visit [www.jointoceancommission.org](http://www.jointoceancommission.org)