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Statement of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative on President Bush's FY 2007 Budget Proposal

Ocean funding is in jeopardy. An initial review of the President's FY 2007 budget proposal provides occasional glimmers of hope, but mostly continuing disappointment as the ocean community struggles to elevate public and political recognition of the importance and urgency of focusing additional resources on ocean-related programs. While we have not had the opportunity to take an in-depth look at all the relevant numbers that directly affect recommendations made by the U.S. Commission on Policy and Pew Oceans Commission, our initial reaction confirms our fear that the fate of our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes remain in jeopardy due to a lack of commitment to fiscal and institutional changes. We will continue to review the budget request during the coming weeks and will provide a more detailed analysis after thoroughly reviewing the entire proposal.

Some promising steps. Requests for additional funding for the National Science Foundation, including support for two major new ocean-related infrastructure projects—the Alaska Regional Research Vessel and the Ocean Observatory Initiative—as well as increases for basic ocean research and ocean education are some of the most promising elements of the President's budget request. Increases provided for habitat restoration programs across the government, as well as the major conservation programs in the U.S. Department of Agriculture are also welcome, although we hope the decision to eliminate two USDA watershed protection programs will not compromise recognition of the need to implement conservation programs in an ecosystem-based management context. In addition, government-wide limited increases are being sought for relatively few ocean and coastal research and management programs, including fish stock assessments, marine navigation, extramural research, undersea research, and ocean exploration.

The President's initiative should include oceans. We applaud the President's commitment to double the federal investment in science education and research for the physical sciences. However, we are deeply concerned that the benefits of this initiative do not extend to the natural resource agencies, such as NOAA, EPA, DOI, and USDA, all of which have physical science and education programs and expertise that can contribute significantly to the initiative. Additionally, the focus of the initiative should be expanded to include the natural sciences, given potential economic opportunities associated with marine biotechnology, bioremediation, the human health implications of contaminated coastal waters and marine resources, and the socioeconomic implications of increasing pressures associated with coastal development.

NOAA, Navy, EPA cuts. Unfortunately, the incremental funding increases are more than offset by stagnation and decreases in funding for various programs across the federal government. The FY 2007 ocean and coastal-related budget request for programs within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration, the nation's lead ocean agency, is \$280 million less than the amount appropriated by Congress for the agency's operations in FY 2006. The request is also \$15 million less than the amount requested by the Administration for these programs in FY 2006.

NOAA programs supporting an integrated ocean observing system, oceans and human health research, marine debris removal, the acquisition of sensitive coastal habitat, the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay, implementation of nonpoint source pollution plans, maintenance of cooperative fisheries research, the transition of NASA research satellites into operational programs, and ocean education were all eliminated or lost significant funding. Funding remained at or below desired levels for other important programs, such as the National Marine Sanctuary Program, National Sea Grant College Program, National Undersea Research Program, and Coastal Zone Management Program.

Also of concern is the limited funding provided for the Navy's basic research program, which has traditionally played a leadership role in ocean science and education. Unfortunately, the role and funding for naval research has eroded over the past few decades. Given the significant funding dedicated to the Department of Defense and the major national security concerns associated with climatic changes and the impacts on oceanic and coastal regimes, increased funding for Navy-sponsored basic research would be a prudent investment.

Of continuing concern is EPA's Clean Water Act State Revolving Funding request of \$688 million, which is 23 percent below the FY 2006 enacted level of \$887 million. These funds allow states to provide sources of low-cost financing for a wide range of water quality infrastructure projects, such as repair of aging sewage treatment facilities. These facilities are crucial to protecting water quality throughout the nation, water that drains to our coasts. This proposed cut is particularly difficult to support given recent estimates indicating that repairs and upgrades to aging wastewater infrastructure will cost the nation \$380 billion over the next 20 years.

Funding is key to protecting our oceans. The stagnation or loss of funding for ocean-related programs is disappointing in light of the comprehensive recommendations and funding requests identified by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission. Our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes are major economic engines, yet are clearly in serious trouble and require urgent attention. While we are facing an austere budget environment, the long-term prosperity of this nation is compromised due to the continuing lack of investment in core programs that will protect, maintain, and restore the health of our ocean and coastal resources and the economic vitality they generate.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission to catalyze ocean policy reform. The Initiative is guided by a ten-member Task Force, five from each Commission, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins and The Honorable Leon E. Panetta, chairs of the U.S. Commission and Pew Commission, respectively. The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform. For more information about the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, visit www.jointoceancommission.org.