

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 10, 2008

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PRESS STATEMENT FROM: The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative

**JOINT OCEAN COMMISSION INITIATIVE CALLS ON NEW FEDERAL
AGENCY LEADERSHIP TO PRIORITIZE OCEANS**

December 10, 2008 (Washington, D.C.) – In the coming week, President-Elect Barack Obama will be making important appointments to top posts overseeing ocean policy. The Secretary of Energy and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, along with the newly-created White House environment, energy and climate “czar,” should work with future Secretary of Commerce Bill Richardson to immediately address the major issues affecting our oceans and coastal communities.

Their first steps should include establishing a comprehensive national ocean policy, increasing investments in ocean and climate science, and securing the country’s economic and national security through U.S. accession to the Law of the Sea Convention. The new administration must also ensure that White House officials address the effects of climate change on our oceans, as they are the engines that ultimately drive our weather systems.

“Our oceans and our country are both at a turning point. These individuals will have unparalleled influence on the future of our oceans, and must collaborate to create comprehensive policy that addresses the current crises,” said Admiral James D. Watkins (U.S. Navy, Ret.), co-chair of the Joint Initiative. “The Obama team has made it clear that they intend to address these issues, and we feel confident that these new leaders will take swift action.” Admiral Watkins is set to receive the nation’s second-highest civilian honor today for his long career in public service, including his work on oceans.

It is undeniable that our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes have enormous economic and ecological value. 70% of our planet is blue, and 6.1 trillion dollars, more than half of our GDP, flows from the ocean economy. Accordingly, the new administration must take an aggressive approach to secure our economic future and curb the continuing deterioration of our oceans.

“The first victim of global warming is our oceans, and there is no greater economic threat to this country and the world than if we fail to recognize the impact of global warming and climate change on our communities,” said the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, co-chair of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. “It’s not too late, if we act now – act to pass comprehensive national policies that recognize and respond to the land-sea-air connection and identify healthy oceans as a priority in the same way we have clean air and clean water. The creation of a White House office overseeing energy, climate change and the environment shows how seriously the next administration is taking these issues.”

Our oceans need new management approaches that bring together resources and experts from across the public, private and academic sectors, additional funding to significantly improve our understanding of the ocean's role in climate change and its impact on our economy and ecosystems, and a recommitment to advancing U.S. leadership in international ocean policy. Without success in these areas, our oceans will continue to deteriorate and the country's safety, economy, environment and well-being will be jeopardized.

For more information on the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative and our work, please visit www.jointoceancommission.org.

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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 Joint Initiative is guided by a ten-member task force, five from each commission, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins (U.S. Navy, Ret.) 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.