

Nancy Sutley
Chair, Council on Environmental Quality
722 Jackson Place NW
Washington DC 20503

June 30, 2009

Dear Ms. Sutley:

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative sincerely appreciated the opportunity to meet with the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force on Monday, June 22. We commend and applaud President Obama for elevating the importance of ocean policy through the issuance of the Presidential Memorandum and the creation of the Task Force. The views and recommendations offered by the Joint Initiative in our presentation, which we summarize below, reflect years of work with representatives from across the spectrum of ocean and coastal stakeholders. We remain committed to providing the Administration and Congress with our full support in pursuit of the establishment of a national ocean policy to guide the use and conservation of our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes.

State of Our Oceans

Our oceans are in crisis. The goods and services that healthy coasts and oceans provide are declining sharply in response to numerous increasing pressures, including depleted fisheries, degraded coastal water quality, and continued degradation of habitat. These pressures are further exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, such as increasing ocean acidification and sea level rise, resulting in significant economic costs, risks to human health, and ecological consequences. An unprecedented level of cooperation and commitment is required to understand, assess, and address these threats in order to improve the health of our ocean and coastal ecosystems and economies and to safeguard our coastal communities. It is essential that our governance system recognize and address these ocean-related issues now to avoid incurring significant future costs and consequences.

Current Governance Challenge

Many of the serious challenges we face in maintaining the health of our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes and balancing competing demands stem from the lack of a coordinated management strategy at the federal level. Our current ocean governance system too often relies on an ad hoc approach from the federal government to address crises or assist regions or states in their efforts to correct serious problems along their coasts or in their bays and estuaries. Significant challenges to better coordination— including conflicting mandates, administrative and congressional budget processes that do not lend themselves to coordination, and workload, time, and resource constraints on agency staff— have prevented us from making significant progress to address a myriad existing and emerging issues facing our oceans. To effectively address the serious issues affecting our oceans, we must move beyond this ad hoc approach by articulating a coherent, strong statement of national ocean policy that

establishes a framework that allows the federal government to work in partnership with regions and states and that rewards federal agencies for coordinating and collaborating.

The Task at Hand: Creating a National Ocean Policy

Meaningful ocean policy reform is long overdue. The creation of a strong statement of national ocean policy will vastly improve how we manage our oceans in the face of the many pressures they are facing. The Task Force process represents a rare opportunity to bring more rationality to the way the federal government protects, maintains, and restores our oceans by creating a framework through which to address conflicting mandates. A national ocean policy, supported by a strong interagency coordinating structure, would unify and guide the actions by the multiple federal agencies with ocean management responsibilities and bring greater coherency to the numerous laws addressing ocean and coastal resources. The increased consistency in federal policy would provide states and businesses with a more predictable regulatory regime in which to plan activities and investments. It can also have a very positive influence on efforts underway in both houses of Congress to legislatively craft a progressive national ocean policy.

While the Task Force faces an ambitious assignment and an aggressive deadline, the good news is that much of background work on establishing a national ocean policy has already been done through the work of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, the Pew Oceans Commission, and the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. In particular, we again urge you to review the reports of these Commissions and a recent report by the Joint Initiative, *Changing Oceans, Changing World: Ocean Priorities for the Obama Administration and Congress*, which draws on the insights of a broad-based group of ocean experts and advocates. All of these documents and additional resources can be found at www.jointoceancommission.org.

Principles to Guide a National Ocean Policy

A national ocean policy is needed to acknowledge the importance of oceans to the nation's economic and ecological health and to protect, maintain, and restore marine ecosystems so that they remain healthy and resilient and able to deliver the services people want and need. The policy would provide a much-needed framework for guiding decision making and coordinating federal actions using an approach that considers the diverse human activities, their benefits, and their potential impacts within the broader context of interconnected social, economic, and ecological factors. Several core principles should underpin a strong national ocean policy, specifically:

- **Sustainability** – A national ocean policy should be designed to protect, maintain, and restore the long-term health, productivity, and diversity of ocean resources to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It should ensure the responsible management and sustainable use of ocean resources held in the public trust, using an ecosystem-based management approach.
- **Ecosystem-based Management Approach** – A national ocean policy should be grounded in an ecosystem-based management approach in order to move management away from the current single-issue focus toward a more comprehensive ecosystem-based approach. An integrated

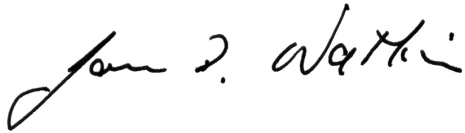
ecosystem-based approach to management of our ocean and coastal resources incorporates the following elements that are fundamental to a national ocean policy: setting goals based on conserving ecosystem services in support of sustainable economic benefits; basing management on ecosystem, not political boundaries; considering cumulative impacts of various activities on ecosystem health; coordinating across sectors to implement strategies to achieve multiple goals; and making clear trade-offs between ecosystem services as related to the goals.

- **Ocean-Land-Atmosphere Connection** – A national ocean policy should be based on the recognition that the oceans, land, and atmosphere are inextricably intertwined and that actions that affect one Earth system component are likely to affect another. This is especially important given the crucial link between oceans and climate change.
- **Multiple Use Management** – A national ocean policy should acknowledge the many activities already taking place or being proposed in our offshore waters. It should support marine spatial planning as an important tool for managing our offshore areas in a way that balances both traditional and new uses while preserving and protecting the overall integrity of the ocean and coastal environments.
- **State, regional, and public participation** – A national ocean policy should facilitate a collaborative approach that encourages the participation of diverse stakeholders and the public. The policy should organize the federal government so it can support regional and state initiatives to address coastal, estuarine, Great Lakes and ocean issues at the regional level. The policy should direct federal agencies to approach these initiatives in a coordinated and cooperative manner, entering into true partnerships that engage the citizens and strengthen support for actions to protect, maintain, and restore these resources.
- **International Responsibility** – A national ocean policy should be designed to enhance and preserve the role of the United States as a global leader in ocean, atmospheric, and climate-related activities. The United States should act cooperatively with other nations in developing and implementing international ocean policy. This is especially true in the Arctic, where rapid environmental changes and expanding access to invaluable resources drives the need for a coherent policy to guide our efforts to better understand the changes and to more effectively manage the activities occurring in the polar region.

To ensure proper administration of the national ocean policy, it is vitally important that the policy has direct oversight from senior leaders of the various federal departments, agencies, and offices, in most cases at the deputy secretary level. High-level leadership within the federal government is crucial to drive strong implementation of the national ocean policy and to improve coordination and communication among ocean agencies. Only with strong senior leadership can we greatly enhance the effectiveness of our management of ocean and coastal resources.

The Joint Initiative stands ready to serve as a resource to the Task Force as it undertakes its duties. Please do not hesitate to contact Laura Cantral at 202.354.6444 or Peter Hill at 202.448.1249 if the Joint Initiative can be of assistance as the process moves forward.

Sincerely



James D. Watkins
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)
Co-Chair, Joint Ocean Commission Initiative



William Ruckelshaus
Commissioner, Joint Ocean Commission Initiative



Dr. Andrew Rosenberg
Commissioner, Joint Ocean Commission Initiative