

September 20, 2006

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker  
The Honorable John Boehner, Majority Leader  
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader  
The Honorable Sherwood L. Boehlert, Chairman, House Committee on Science  
The Honorable Richard W. Pombo, Chairman, House Committee on Resources  
The Honorable Bart Gordon, Ranking Member, House Committee on Science  
The Honorable Nick Rahall, Ranking Member, House Committee on Resources  
The Honorable Vernon J. Ehlers, Chairman, Subcommittee on Environment, Technology, and Standards, House Committee on Science  
The Honorable Wayne T. Gilchrest, Chairman, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Conservation, Wildlife, and Oceans, House Committee on Resources  
The Honorable David Wu, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Environment, Technology, and Standards, House Committee on Science  
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Conservation, Wildlife, and Oceans, House Committee on Resources

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives:

As co-chairs of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, a bipartisan effort of the members of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission, we are writing to commend you on passage of H.R 5450, a bill that will help to clarify and codify the authority and responsibility of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Both the U.S. and Pew Commissions argued strongly for an organic statute for NOAA. Such a bill would significantly strengthen the agency by providing a clear mandate from Congress to the nation's lead civilian agency for oceans and atmosphere. The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative's recent report, *From Sea to Shining Sea*, also calls on Congress to codify and strengthen NOAA and thereby enhance its mission, improve its structure, and better enable it to carry out existing and new responsibilities in a manner that is consistent with an ecosystem-based management approach.

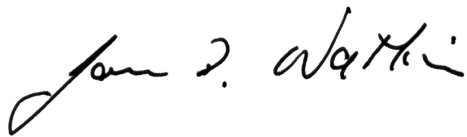
Although H.R. 5450 represents real progress toward strengthening NOAA, it clearly must be enhanced by incorporating guidance on fishery management, coastal zone management, ocean mapping and charting, and other issues under the jurisdiction of the House Resources Committee, as called for in the Joint Initiative's report. We believe that the inclusion of such provisions is essential if NOAA is to effectively and efficiently carry out a host of ocean-related activities essential to our nation's economic and environmental interests. Nevertheless, the bill in its current form represents a welcome effort to

overcome a major hurdle that impedes the federal government's ability to effectively govern our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes.

Passage of H.R. 5450 sends a clear signal that the health and productivity of our nation's oceans are a priority to the U.S. House of Representatives and sets the stage for additional work in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. We are hopeful that in the next Congress the Science Committee and the Resources Committee will complete action on this critical issue and work with the Senate to enact final legislation.

Again, we applaud your commitment to enhancing NOAA's ability to accomplish its vital work on behalf of the nation, and we look forward to working closely with you next year to complete the task.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James D. Watkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

James D. Watkins  
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)  
Chairman, U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leon E. Panetta". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal underline.

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta  
Chair, Pew Oceans Commission