

# Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Progress and Prospects for National Ocean Policy

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## Acknowledgements for Conference

- It is my pleasure to join you here today at the second annual Heceta Head Coastal Conference. This is a great event and it is wonderful to see so many people who are committed to improving the plight of Oregon's ocean and coast gathered in one place to discuss how to make that happen.
- I have to tell you that I have been an ocean policy junkie for more years than I care to confess, but when I had my first job in this field, I was given an assignment to research and prepare an assessment of what coastal states were doing with regard to ocean resource management.
- I quickly discovered that Oregon was a pioneer in ocean management at the state level, with your Territorial Sea Plan and the designation of the Oregon Ocean Stewardship Area.
- Several years later, when working with ocean committee appointed by Governor Chiles in Florida, Oregon was a model.
- So, I have long been an admirer of the leadership Oregon has demonstrated with regard to the oceans and I'm delighted to be with you today to talk about the work of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative and to highlight some of the national ocean policy priorities that the Joint Initiative has been focusing its efforts on.

## Joint Ocean Commission Initiative

- My intent is not to go into background about the Commissions. Suffice to say that in 2003 and 2004, the Pew Oceans Commission and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy released their reports containing historic recommendations for ocean policy reform.
- Remember that although the Commissions were doing their work at about the same time, they did that work independent of each other. And when the Commissions were developing their reports, we wondered where they would come out—and there was a lot of speculation about that. What we discovered was that the commissions were looking at the same problems.
- And in response, both Commissions identified similar priorities for addressing these problems. Cornerstones of their recommendations:
  - A need to transition towards ecosystem-based management
  - Increasing reliance on science in management decisions
  - Increasing funding for ocean and coastal programs

- Upon release of the two reports in 2003 and 2004, members of both commissions saw a clear opportunity for the two commissions to work together in a bipartisan way to push forward the reforms that they all agreed are so necessary.
- So in an effort to capitalize on the momentum generated by the work of the two commissions, and to encourage continued attention to their reports, in 2004, Commissioners formed the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative.
  - The Joint Initiative is a collaborative, bi-partisan effort to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform and to encourage that reform to be consistent with the commissions' recommendations.
  - This effort is led by Mr. Leon Panetta, chair of the Pew Commission and Admiral James Watkins, chair of the U.S. Commission.
  - The Joint Initiative pursues its goal to significantly influence and accelerate the pace of ocean policy reform in a number of ways:
    - Monitoring, assessing, and helping stimulate progress being made toward meaningful ocean policy reform at the national, regional, and state levels.
    - For example, at the beginning of this year the Joint Initiative released a Report Card assessing the nation on progress in implementing the commissions' recommendations.
    - We will do another report card next year and are hoping that the next report will show continuing progress in the regions and additional effort at the national level.
  - The Joint Initiative also provides guidance and assistance to ocean champions on Capitol Hill, in the Administration and federal agencies, and to leaders in the states and regions.
    - For example, in response to a request from a bipartisan group of 10 senators, the Joint Initiative delivered to Congress a report entitled *From Sea to Shining Sea* that described the Joint Initiative's top ten priorities for Congressional action on oceans.
  - And through its convening capacity, the Joint Initiative is helping increase the recognition that there are common agendas across interests in the ocean community that have traditionally not been well coordinated, often putting them at cross purposes or diluting their effectiveness.

**As demonstrated by your interest and your presence here today, everyone in this room knows that our oceans are vitally important.**

The health of our oceans is critically important—important because it is about life itself, important because it is about our spirit, and about our future.

A few facts recognized by the commissions:

#### The economic value of our oceans is significant

- Our watershed counties contribute over \$6.1 trillion, more than one half of the nation's annual gross domestic product.
- In 2003, ocean-related economic activity contributed more than \$119 billion to the economy and supported well over 2.2 million jobs.

- Annually, our ports handle more than \$700 billion in goods with an additional \$11 billion in spending resulting from the cruise industry.
- As Oregon citizens, coastal residents, and managers, you know how important ocean resources are to your economic and environmental well-being.

**And yet, Our Oceans, Coasts and Great Lakes are still in Crisis.**

You all know this, you are (students/professionals) working on ocean issues every day: the state of the oceans is not good and getting worse. But it is a crisis that doesn't capture the daily headlines; it is a chronic, quiet crisis that needs attention before it becomes acute, and before it is too late.

Both Commissions came to the same conclusions—that our oceans are in trouble:

- Our fisheries are in trouble – here on the West Coast, a Commercial Fishery Failure declared in August for California and Oregon salmon fisheries, and other fisheries are in dire straits. It's a similar story elsewhere, with collapsing fisheries up and down the East Coast.
- There are enormous impacts associated with hurricanes and other increasingly frequent & intense storms.
- Harmful (and often toxic) Algal Blooms are increasingly plaguing the West Coast, the East Coast, and the Gulf Coast of Florida.
- Massive Dead Zones have long existed in the Gulf of Mexico and the Chesapeake Bay, but now we are seeing them off the coast of Oregon and Washington, with signs they might be developing off the California coast.
- Despite conservation commitments to save coastal wetlands and other habitats, we continue to suffer loss of these areas that are so important for nurseries for marine species, filters for healthy waters, and buffers from coastal storms.
- Invasive Species cause substantial economic and ecologic losses.
- We are witnessing continuing loss of coral reefs, and
- Poor water quality, as a result of inadequate storm water management and other measures are impacting human health and forcing beach closures.

**These problems are exacerbated by the fact that our system of Ocean Governance is Broken.**

What we have is a dysfunctional, out-of-date, and inadequate system of ocean and coastal governance at the national level that is contributing to the state of our oceans.

- The absence of a coherent national ocean policy, fragmented laws, confusing and overlapping jurisdictions hinder our management efforts.
- In addition, a dearth of U.S. leadership in International Ocean and coastal forums threatens our national economic and security interests.
- And frankly, not much money goes to funding ocean and coastal research and management, and last year even that was cut. This dwindling U.S. investment in ocean and coastal management, research, science, and education compromises our ability to tackle problems like the ones I just mentioned, including global warming, resource depletion, harmful algal blooms, invasive species, and nonpoint source water pollution, to name just a few.

**The Good News is, however, that there is hope. Important Achievements are being made, particularly at the Regional and State Level:**

- Of course, we have last month's landmark agreement among Governors Kulongoski, Schwarzenegger, and Gregoire to work together to advance ocean health along the West Coast.
- Similar leadership is being shown by coalitions of states in the Northeast, Gulf of Mexico, and the Great Lakes, and we're also seeing growing leadership on ocean issues in individual states, including all three West Coast states, New York, Massachusetts, Florida, and others.
- However, a lack of federal support for emerging Regional Ocean and coastal governance initiatives hampers the ability of these initiatives to help solve important ocean and coastal problems.
- Ultimately, to be successful in addressing the issues oceans and coasts are facing, it will take a partnership between states and federal government.

**I would be remiss if I did not commend the efforts of the Administration to address ocean policy:**

- Upon release of the US Commission's report, the President responded with his U.S. Ocean Action Plan and an interagency structure to provide greater attention to and coordination around ocean issues within the numerous federal agencies with ocean management responsibilities.
- And of course, this summer, the President's designation of the Northwest Hawaiian Islands as a National Monument is very exciting—creating the largest marine protected area in the world.
- The Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology has been working on and incorporating input into its Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy to guide national investment in ocean science.

**Earlier this year the Joint Initiative received a request for input from a bipartisan group of 10 Senators, asking for the Joint Initiative's top ten recommendations for congressional action.**

- On June 13, the Joint Initiative delivered that report, *From Sea to Shining Sea*, outlining those top 10 priorities.
- I'd like to quickly summarize the top 10 recommendations of that report. The recommendations I'm going to describe to you represent the priorities that the Joint Initiative will be focusing its efforts on in the upcoming year.

**Pending Ocean Legislation**

- First of all, there are a number of important bills that have made significant progress through the legislative process, and this is in large part due to the leadership and commitment of the members of the Senate Commerce Committee, and the Senate.
- For example, there is a marine debris bill one small step away from being sent to the President's desk, and there are a number of other bills addressing: corals protection, tsunami warnings, and of course, fisheries management. While the contingencies of the election and what will (or will

not) happen during a lame duck session are big unknowns, these are bills that can and should be passed into law during this Congress.

### **Reforming Ocean Governance at the National Level**

- National Ocean Policy—we need an ocean policy for this nation—we have one for water, one for air, but we need a policy that recognizes the value of our oceans to our future and our commitment to protecting and managing them in a sustainable manner.
- Codify NOAA—NOAA needs a statutory framework that includes a national ocean policy and support for regional approaches.
- Coordinated and comprehensive offshore management regime – We need to figure out how to look at the big picture and make tradeoffs between conflicting uses of the ocean.

### **Support for Regional Approaches to Ocean Governance**

- As I've mentioned, the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative believes that regional ocean governance is important for enabling us to address issues plaguing our oceans and coasts.
- We need legislation to create a national framework to support regional approaches and collaboration and enable coordinated, integrated ecosystem-based management that builds on existing local efforts.
- This framework should support the development and implementation of local processes that involve federal, state, tribal, and local governments, as well as the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and academic institutions, working together toward regional actions that advance National Ocean and coastal interests.
- Regional governance mechanisms will vary to meet needs of different regions, but should be encouraged to possess certain characteristics, including the right size and representation, strong citizen advisory involvement, strategic plans generated from the bottom up.

### **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea**

- We need to become a party to this treaty—how can we be credible with the rest of the world if we are the only industrialized nation that is not a part?
- The United States Senate should provide its advice and consent to U.S. accession to the convention so that the United States can once again assume a leadership position in international forums deciding such vital ocean matters as jurisdictional claims over the continental margin with its vast energy resources, deep seabed mining, scientific research, and environmental protection.
- The President supports, DOD supports, virtually all of the U.S. Senate supports, outside groups such as industry & environmental organizations all support the convention.

## Fisheries Management

- Of course, fisheries management reform is very important—there’s a good bill to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act that has passed in the Senate, and issues to work out with the House bill—but this is an extremely important law and it is important to press for passage in this Congress.

## Science, Research, and Education

- It’s tragic how little we have focused on understanding our oceans and communicating that understanding to all Americans, especially our next generation of leaders.
- The Joint Initiative has been working to strongly encourage Congress to support enhanced ocean research and education programs.
  - Oceans must be incorporated into national endeavors like the President’s Innovation & Competitiveness Initiative;
  - We need a national ocean education strategy, with particular attention to enhancing NOAA & NSF ocean programs;
  - The ocean community should weigh in on and stand ready to support the Administration’s Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy when it is released this December;
  - And Congress should continue to support the development of the nation’s Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS).

## Funding

All of this takes funding, and our Nation’s ocean budget is not up to where it should be.

- Less than six percent of the federal budget goes to oceans.
- Funding for some key ocean and coastal programs has continued to suffer decreases.
- The outlook for FY2007 is uncertain; the Senate subcommittee responsible for most ocean and coastal appropriations has proposed mostly adequate funding for those programs, but the full appropriations committee has yet to act, and then it depends what happens in conference between the House and the Senate.
- The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative will continue to press for increases to funding for ocean and coastal activities throughout the federal government in FY 2007 and beyond, with an initial focus on enhancing core base programs and support for a few broad initiatives.
- In addition, the Joint Initiative believes that it is critical to have a dedicated source of funds to deal with ocean issues. Establishing a dedicated Ocean Trust Fund is one of the most important early steps Congress could take to demonstrate its commitment to a new national ocean policy.

## Wrap Up

I’ll conclude by saying that Commissioners, those working as and with the Joint Initiative all recognize that this country is facing a number of crises—war, immigration, energy security.

- But the fact is that our oceans are in crisis, too. The good news, however, is that it is not too late.

- We think there is a real opportunity to build bipartisan coalitions of leadership to address this crisis.
- I'm optimistic that the future is positive
  - Attention is being drawn to these issues.
  - We benefit from the strength of leaders like Watkins and Panetta.
  - All of you are doing your part. I urge you to recommit to that leadership and help us get the attention of people in Washington. Democracy is hard to work with, but worth it.
- States like Oregon, and your neighbors to the north and south are demonstrating that leadership. The Joint Initiative applauds those efforts of those states, and others, and we encourage the federal government to step up.
- The goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to significantly influence and accelerate the pace of ocean policy reform at the regional and national levels. The Joint Initiative's capacity to accomplish this goal is grounded on several fundamental characteristics:
  - The strong commonality of the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission—both of which clearly recognized the plight of the oceans and coasts and issued very similar and mutually reinforcing recommendations for how this situation should be addressed.
  - The broad-based, bipartisan, and regionally diverse nature of the combined Commissioner base—a base that has been maintained and strengthened over time through the work of the Joint Initiative to date.
  - An underlying change strategy that focuses on catalyzing action at the regional level and on specific national legislative and administrative priorities; designed to both improve ocean policy and management through those specific actions and to generate regional momentum that can influence policy change in Washington, D.C.
  - Implementing efforts to increase the recognition of common agendas across interests in the ocean community that traditionally have not been well coordinated and have often worked at cross-purposes, hence diluting their influence.
  - Establishing more effective linkages between the scientific and policy communities.
  - Use of the convening and communication power of the Joint Initiative through the reputation and bipartisan reach of the co-chairs (Leon Panetta and Admiral James Watkins) and the other Pew and U.S Commissioners to influence change at the national and regional levels.