Testimony of
the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative to the
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies for NOAA, NSF, and NASA

March 26, 2015

Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Mikulski, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, we thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative, bipartisan effort to catalyze meaningful ocean policy reform and action at the national, regional, and state levels. Established in 2005, the Joint Initiative promotes, maintains, and updates the important work of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission. Our 2013 report, Charting the Course: Securing the Future of America’s Oceans, contains recommendations to improve the management of our ocean resources that are echoed here.

The Joint Initiative is highly appreciative of the progress your subcommittee has made in providing incremental but substantive additional resources to critical ocean and coastal accounts. We are acutely aware of the challenges you face addressing the funding needs of all the programs within the jurisdiction of your subcommittee. The Joint Initiative believes a continued commitment to protecting base funding and core programs at NOAA, NSF, and NASA that help manage, protect, and better understand our nation’s oceans and coasts and the Arctic is an investment in the future of our country that will provide significant economic, social, ecological, and national security benefits. Among the many ocean and coastal programs under your jurisdiction, we urge that maintaining and increasing investment in the following programs be prioritized in FY2016 appropriations:

Coastal Resilience

The Joint Initiative strongly supports increasing NOAA’s overall budget to $6 billion, and in doing so maintaining the recent trend toward balancing NOAA’s portfolio to emphasize ocean and coastal priorities. For example NOAA’s National Ocean Service (NOS) would be increased in NOAA’s FY 2016 budget by nearly $60 million to $574 million. Specifically, within NOS, we ask you to consider funding the Regional Coastal Resilience Grant program consistent with NOAA’s FY 2016 budget request at $50 million, a $45 million increase from the FY 2015 proposal. An important element of this program is its ability to provide competitive funding to support multi-state regional ocean partnerships that coordinate data sharing and decision making across jurisdictions, implement innovative solutions to shared priorities, and effectively engage ocean and coastal stakeholders.

These partnerships are increasingly critical as states and communities confront challenges such as ocean acidification, sea level rise, competing demands for ocean resources, burgeoning populations along our coasts, and increasing threats from extreme weather events. Resilient coastal communities are not only able to minimize loss and negative impacts to life, property, and the coastal ecosystem, they are also able to quickly return residents to productive activities and restore essential services. This is imperative to facilitating full and timely economic, social, and environmental recovery. Fully
funding this program will enable NOAA and its partners to address a suite of challenges, including a more efficient application of limited resources to ensure the health of our oceans and coasts.

**Ocean Acidification**

The Joint Initiative believes the inclusion of $30 million in the NOAA budget for the Integrated Ocean Acidification program is essential to help us begin to address the chemistry, variability, and impact of acidification on the marine environment. Ocean acidification is a global problem needing global solutions, and it is occurring along every shoreline in the United States. While shellfish and coral reefs receive most of the attention related to ocean acidification, fisheries, aquaculture, and coastal ecosystems and economies around the nation will be greatly affected. Funding the Integrated Ocean Acidification program at NOAA at increased levels will allow us to measure and assess the emerging threat of ocean acidification, better understand the complex dynamics causing and exacerbating it, work to determine its impact, and develop mechanisms to address it.

**Arctic**

The Joint Initiative recommends that Congress make a significant investment through the FY 2016 appropriations bill toward implementation of the National Strategy for the Arctic Region. This will support the United States chairmanship of the Arctic Council over the next two years, and lay the groundwork for sound international management of the region while protecting a sensitive and rapidly changing ecosystem. Increased funding for federal agencies operating in the Arctic, such as NOAA and NSF, is essential to our international leadership in the region and will enable cross-cutting efficiencies with the Coast Guard, the Navy, and the Department of the Interior.

The Joint Initiative is convening an Arctic Ocean Leadership Roundtable with U.S. Arctic leaders and key stakeholders from multiple sectors to generate ideas for how local, state, and regional work can inform and influence national policy with regard to Arctic ocean and coastal issues. Many of the ideas generated in this forum can be implemented with increased investment in the Arctic. Such investment can also encourage better collaboration with state and local governments, Alaskan Native leaders, and industry to improve the ability of commercial entities to operate safely in the region and ensure effective response and recovery in the event of a natural or human-caused disaster. This includes improving coordination and data-sharing on oil spill planning, preparedness, and response, vessel tracking, and search-and-rescue, as well as investment in new icebreakers, aircraft, and shore-based infrastructure. Additionally, funding Arctic-related programs at NOAA enables a range of important services essential to our understanding of the Arctic including ocean observation services, weather and sea ice predictions, mapping and charting, and sound management of marine resources.

**Sustained Ocean Observations**

We are strongly supportive of enhanced capabilities for NOAA’s Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), the Integrated Ocean Observing System, and similar programs at NSF. Specifically we ask you to consider funding OAR at $500 million to support the continued and enhanced operations of this vital program. This funding is central to NOAA’s ability to accurately forecast weather, enable communities to plan for and respond to climate events such as flooding and drought, and protect and manage the Nation’s coastal and ocean resources.
Funding NOAA’s Sustained Ocean Observations and Monitoring program under this account at $42 million will provide information essential for accurate forecasting of hurricanes, typhoons, flooding, heat waves, and wildfires. For example, data and analyses of ocean and atmospheric conditions are increasingly used for drought early warning systems, enhanced tsunami warning systems, and storm surge monitoring. Ocean observations are also imperative for calibrating and validating satellite observations. Maintaining baseline ocean observations in support of weather and regional predictions, fisheries management ecosystem studies, tide and current monitoring, and sea level change is essential. Sustained ocean observations will help maintain the continuity of long-term data sets that are essential for ensuring that communities are able to respond and adapt to a rapidly changing world, both today and into the future.

**Sustainable Fisheries**

In 2006 Congress made the bold decision to end overfishing once and for all by amending the Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act to require annual catch limits and associated accountability measures to be implemented for all federally managed fisheries. Through the commitment and tireless efforts of our fishermen, fishery management councils, scientists and managers, the U.S. is poised to achieve this historic milestone in natural resource management. With the investment in stock assessments, cooperative research and innovation, and science-based management, the U.S. model of fisheries management has become an international hallmark for addressing the ecological and economic sustainability challenges facing global fisheries. The Joint Initiative supports domestic and international efforts to fully implement the recommendations in the Presidential Task Force on Combating IUU Fishing and Seafood Fraud, along with similar efforts for enhanced enforcement like the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The end of chronic overfishing means healthier ocean ecosystems and a brighter future for fishermen and coastal communities. The Joint Initiative asks the Subcommittee to consider restoring funding for NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) at the requested level of $990 million, allowing it to continue movement towards sustainable management of fish stocks within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone.

**Ocean Exploration**

The Joint Initiative appreciates the Sub-Committee’s long standing support of ocean exploration at NOAA and requests that you provide $28 million for the Ocean Exploration program, consistent with funding in FY 2015, to increase the pace, scope, and efficiency of exploration. This would be $9 million above the NOAA budget request for FY 2016. A bipartisan effort since inception, the Ocean Exploration program was strongly endorsed by Congress when created in 2002. The program has greatly contributed to our knowledge of the ocean, producing Arctic surveys which enabled the U.S. to argue for an extension of our own Exclusive Economic Zone; baseline characterization of the Deepwater Horizon site in the Gulf before and after the oil spill; discovery of new gas hydrates stretching from Cape Cod to Cape Hatteras, with implications for coastal hazards and ocean acidification; and new fishery habitat maps off the Northeast.

**Science, Research, and Education**

The Joint Initiative calls attention to the need for consistent and dedicated funding for ocean science, research, and education. We ask you to increase funding for ocean science infrastructure, research, and grant programs at NOAA, NSF, and NASA that are working to improve our understanding of
critical physical and biological ocean processes. These programs provide local, state, and national
decision makers with the information they need to make informed decisions. The Joint Initiative also
urges you to fund education programs at increased levels. Ocean education efforts are critical for
cultivating current and future ocean stewards, especially given the growth in careers that require
ocean-related education and knowledge.

In particular, we encourage you to provide $7.7 billion for the NSF, including $1.365 billion for the
Geosciences Directorate and its Division of Ocean Science. NSF’s investment in the geosciences has
spurred innovations, addressed important national and global challenges, spurred new economic
sectors, and led to the development and implementation of advanced technologies that save lives,
protect property, and support our economy. For example, investments supporting basic research in
mathematics, physical sciences, computer sciences, and geosciences, have led to the development of
sophisticated models, satellites, radar, and instrumentation that has greatly improved hurricane
forecasting, now allowing for nearly a week of preparations by cities, businesses, institutions, and
undoubtedly saving lives.

We also urge $1.95 billion in funding for the NASA’s Earth Science Division, up from $1.77 billion in
FY 2015 to support critically important ocean and coastal science and education. NASA satellites can
view Earth as a planet and enable the study of it as a complex, dynamic system of diverse
components: the oceans, atmosphere, continents, ice sheets, and life. Through partnerships with
agencies that maintain forecasting and decision support systems, NASA improves national
capabilities to predict climate, weather, and natural hazards; manage resources; and support the
development of environmental policy.

Concluding Remarks

The Joint Initiative greatly appreciates your commitment to stretching scarce resources to address
the challenges of a maritime nation. We will continue to track progress in advancing key ocean and
coastal programs and accounts in FY 2016 and beyond. Recommendations from “Charting the
Course” and other reports from the Joint Initiative identify specific areas of achievement and
deficiency. Implementation of the recommendations will secure the future of our nation’s ocean
ecosystems, and the critical resources they provide, and ensure that they will be abundant and able
to support America’s ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes economies and the jobs and communities on
which our nation depends.

Thank you for considering our requests as the Subcommittee begins it FY 2016 appropriations
process. The Joint Initiative appreciates your attention to this matter and stands ready to assist you
in advancing positive and lasting changes in the way we manage our nation’s oceans and coasts.

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