

Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee¹ input to the President's Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, Approved August 11, 2009

The Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) is pleased to provide its input on the development of a National Policy for Oceans, Coasts, and the Great Lakes, pursuant to President Obama's Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force Memorandum of June 12, 2009.

The purpose of establishing this national policy is to better meet our Nation's stewardship responsibilities for the oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes for the benefit of this and future generations. To this end, the national policy should embrace and balance four ideals: 1) The Nation's need for food security; 2) The need for healthy and resilient coastal communities; 3) The preservation of ocean ecosystem health and biodiversity; 4) The sustainable use of marine resources.

Specifically, MAFAC recommends that the National Policy for Oceans, Coasts and the Great Lakes, include the following principles:

- **Promote coastal community health** -- Ensuring coastal community health and resilience will require strong collaboration and consensus building among coastal communities and diverse and potentially competing interests of coastal user groups. This will require balancing uses, such as seafood production, recreation, and energy production, and a process for resolving conflicts as they arise.
- **Be science-based** -- The policy should adopt a foundational principle of best available science, technology and information to promote system-wide ecosystem health and biodiversity. A continuing investment in science, coupled with the newest technology available, provides value to the nation by ensuring a responsible balance between use and protection of the ocean environment.
- **Promote Seafood Security:** Provide for healthy, sustainable, and resilient fisheries to meet increased needs for domestic seafood consumption through well-managed wild-capture and aquaculture production. Continued emphasis needs to be placed on producing secure, wholesome seafood at sustainable levels, ultimately reducing the Nation's seafood trade deficit.
- **Achieve Research and Management Integration:** Require an integration of ocean, land, and atmospheric agencies collaborating on research and management. Ecologically relevant scales of management and research needs to be the norm, rather than being driven by political boundaries or single-agency perspectives and decision making.

To carry out the policy, a framework for ocean policy coordination and its implementation should promote collaboration and partnerships between the federal government, states, tribes, regional fishery management councils, and regional stakeholders; be transparent; incorporate

¹ MAFAC was established in 1970 to advise the Secretary of Commerce on matters relating to conservation and management of living marine resources under the jurisdiction of the Department. MAFAC is composed of a diverse group of stakeholders appointed by the Secretary. Contact: MAFAC Executive Director, Mark.Holliday@noaa.gov, (301) 713-2239 ext. 120.

science-based decision making processes; integrate accountability at all stages; and have adequate, dedicated, and secure resources and funding to be effective. This framework should:

- Build upon the strength of successful existing entities or regional collaborations that work on ocean policy components. Duplication of existing efforts should be avoided.
- Incorporate a timely transition or migration of efforts from existing strategies, where necessary.
- Include marine spatial planning, as defined below, as a tool for analysis of options, to help evaluate and balance the needs of multiple ocean uses, and to support sound ocean policy decision making. Marine Spatial Planning is a comprehensive, ecosystem-based process through which compatible human uses are objectively and transparently allocated to appropriate ocean areas to sustain critical ecological, economic, and cultural services for future generations.
- Promote effectiveness and incorporate binding coordination requirements between parties where possible; include dispute resolution mechanisms; and have an identified, ultimate arbiter. It should not be dependent upon superficial or optional requirements, but should have the means to promptly resolve jurisdictional conflicts among agencies or regional governing bodies
- In addition to an accountability and review process, incorporate principles of adaptive management that encourage flexibility and continuous improvement.

Leadership: NOAA is the Nation's strongest ocean advocate, ensuring ocean ecosystem health and biodiversity through: sustainable use of marine resources including commercial and recreational fisheries and aquaculture; protection of endangered species and special places; incorporation of ecosystem-based management; and integration of analytical data management tools such as marine spatial planning to support science-based policy setting and management decisions.

Therefore, NOAA should use this opportunity to advise the President to confirm and acknowledge NOAA as the nation's lead agency for ocean science and management. NOAA is positioned to be at the center of a National ocean policy. NOAA has comprehensive world-class observational and analytical capabilities and applies these to its science-based regulatory authorities to govern, regulate and enforce ocean policies from the upper reaches of watersheds to the deep ocean. No other federal agency has this range of capabilities, authorities and responsibilities, and NOAA is uniquely situated to perform the coordination and collaboration necessary with other agencies at all levels of government.

Finally, it is vital that NOAA's present stewardship responsibilities and efforts to safeguard the ocean's ecosystem health and biodiversity not be compromised in a new National Ocean Policy or the framework designed for its implementation. Just as with the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Clean Water Act, and other resource protection laws, our Nation has recognized the value of protecting natural systems and species over other human-related activities, when necessary. While a balance of different needs and ocean uses will be required, it is imperative that the natural environment, ecosystem health and biodiversity are not compromised irreversibly. Protection of the ocean's natural systems is essential to sustain human food security, health, and well being for current and future generations.