



December 15, 2003

The Honorable Richard W. Pombo
Chairman, Committee on Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-6201

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter provides the Department of Commerce's views on H.R. 959, "the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Oceanography Amendments Act of 2003." The Department endorses the goals of H.R. 959, which support the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) mission to conserve and wisely manage the Nation's coastal and marine resources. The Department, however, has several concerns with H.R. 959, as introduced.

First, the bill includes specific authorization for some facilities, such as the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, but it provides only general authorization for others. For example, it authorizes activities related to coastal environmental health and biomolecular research, but not the Center for Environmental Health and Biomolecular Research where most of this research is conducted. NOAA appreciates Congress' interest in its laboratories and requests that language be added allowing the agency flexibility to create new laboratories and programs, or to reassign tasks as needed, in order to better meet its mission as needs change.

Second, the Department recommends one change to Section 5 of the bill, which would amend the authorities for the ocean exploration program found in Section 206 of Public Law 102-567. The language authorizes the ocean exploration program to conduct public education and outreach activities "in conjunction" with the National Sea Grant College Program (Sea Grant) and the National Science Foundation Centers for Ocean Science Education Excellence (COSEE). The Department would prefer that the language specify "cooperation" rather than "conjunction." This would allow the ocean exploration program to continue to sponsor and to conduct public education and outreach activities that are complementary to Sea Grant and COSEE's work without having to conduct each activity with them each time; in some cases, joint programs might not be the most efficient use of available resources. The Department also recommends amending Section 206(c)(4) by adding the word "services" to the list of donations that the ocean exploration program can accept. This would allow for individuals with particular expertise in NOAA's issues to contribute their knowledge to assisting our mission.

Offices and programs across NOAA are working on issues related to collecting, processing, and applying observations of the coastal environment. The Coastal Observation Technology System is one component of this effort. NOAA has also assisted *Ocean.US* in the development of a plan

The Honorable Richard W. Pombo
Page 2

for a national ocean and coastal ocean observing system. The Committee may wish also to recognize these other components of NOAA's ocean and coastal observation efforts in H.R. 959.

Further, the legislation's authorization for open ocean observations is limited to Argo floats. Argo is part of a larger observational network dedicated to describing, understanding, and predicting the Earth's climate system and to improving the management of our nation's ocean and coastal resources. If the Congress intends to authorize activities to implement a comprehensive and integrated ocean and coastal observing system, then the legislation should be amended to include the full range of ocean and coastal observing system components and to provide flexibility to incorporate new technologies and elements over time.

The authorization of appropriations section of H.R. 959 should be consistent with the President's budget. Funding levels for Arctic research fall short of the President's FY 2004 request.

The Department of Commerce appreciates the opportunity to present views on H.R. 959 and looks forward to working with you as this bill moves through the legislative process. The Office of Management and Budget has advised that there is no objection to the transmittal of these views from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely,



Theodore W. Kassinger

cc: The Honorable Nick Rahall II
Ranking Member