



May 26, 1999

The Honorable Don Young
Chairman, Committee on Resources
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

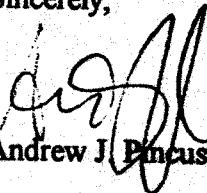
This letter provides you with the Department of Commerce's views on H.R. 1243, entitled the "National Marine Sanctuaries Enhancement Act of 1999." The reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) is of great importance to the Department and provides a unique opportunity to ensure the continued protection and management of important marine resources into the next century. The Department respectfully requests that you amend H.R. 1243 to reflect the views and recommendations provided in the enclosure, and looks forward to working with you on the reauthorization of the NMSA.

The Department supports the reauthorization of the NMSA at the authorization levels proposed by H.R. 1243 which are consistent with the President's FY 2000 request. The increased funding is important to allow the National Marine Sanctuary System to reach its full potential. The Department also supports the concept of limiting designations of new sanctuaries. However, the Department does have some concerns regarding the wording of this limitation in H.R. 1243. (See enclosure.) The Department would be pleased to work with Committee staff on language to meet both of our purposes.

The Administration is currently developing a proposal for reauthorizing the NMSA and this proposal will soon be sent to you. The Administration's proposal includes changes to the NMSA that the Department believes will increase the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's ability to successfully manage the Sanctuary System and protect sanctuary resources.

The Office of Management and Budget advises that there is no objection to the submission of these views for the consideration of the Committee from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely,



Andrew J. Pincus

Enclosure

Department of Commerce Views on H.R. 1243

While the Department of Commerce recognizes and shares the Chairman's wish that any expansion of the National Marine Sanctuary System be postponed until the existing sites are funded at a level to allow effective implementation of their management plans, how this level is defined in H.R. 1243 may be unnecessarily restrictive. At this time, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has no plans to propose additional sites to the National Marine Sanctuary System, with the exception of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, which is nearing the end of the designation process. However, NOAA would like to ensure that the language used to set forth this limitation does not unduly constrain the interests of states, local communities, or the program.

NOAA does not wish to miss the opportunity to protect resources that might warrant sanctuary status. While NOAA believes that site characterizations of all natural and cultural resources in each sanctuary must be completed, we question whether it is necessary or practical to require them all to be completed prior to beginning the designation of any new sites. Site characterizations are a very time and resource intensive endeavor allowing for only one or two to be started each year, with each taking several years to complete. Completing full site characterizations for all existing sites should be an ongoing process that is budgeted for and integrated into program development, with the concurrent flexibility for appropriate growth of the System.

Additionally, NOAA would like to be able to plan for expansion by developing a rigorous protocol for selecting new sites. When NOAA is ready to designate new sites, such a protocol would ensure that they are qualified to be awarded sanctuary status.

Identical letter sent to:

The Honorable George Miller
House Resources Committee