WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY STUDY
UNITED STATES SENATE

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Good afternoon Chairman Sununu, Senator Boxer, and members of the Committee. I am Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) within the Department of Commerce. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on NOAA's response to the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and our role in implementing components of the Administration's response to that report — the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan.*

On September 20, 2004, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy fulfilled its congressional mandate to submit recommendations for a coordinated and comprehensive national ocean policy to the President and Congress. The Commission's final report, *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century*, contains 212 recommendations addressing a broad range of ocean and coastal topics. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy outlined the need for enhancing ocean leadership and coordination, developing the institutional capacity to coordinate across jurisdictional boundaries, and strengthening the agency structure in phases in order to enhance the goal of addressing management needs through an ecosystem-based approach.

In response to the Commission's findings and recommendations, the President issued Executive Order no. 13366, on December 17, 2004, establishing a Cabinet-level Committee on Ocean Policy, whose membership includes the Secretaries of Commerce, State, Defense, the Interior, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Transportation, Energy, and Homeland Security, and the Attorney General. Other members of the Committee on Ocean Policy include the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Director of National Intelligence, the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Director of the National Science Foundation, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs, Homeland Security Domestic Policy, Economic

Policy, and an employee of the Office of the Vice President. The Committee on Ocean Policy created a framework to coordinate the ocean and coastal related activities of over 20 federal agencies that administer over 140 laws, and facilitates coordination and support to the numerous state, tribal, and local programs with the overall goal of improved ocean governance. At the same time, the President released the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, which identifies immediate short-term and long-term actions necessary to more effectively manage coastal and ocean resources.

Both the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, and the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, recognize that partnerships are vital to halting the degradation of our oceans, and to our realizing their full potential. Thus, an underlying theme of my testimony today is "partnerships are essential for success." There are many agencies with important ocean and coastal responsibilities with which NOAA partners, and we take great pride and place great importance in continuing to strengthen our role as the lead civilian ocean agency.

NOAA is at the center of the federal government's understanding, awareness, and stewardship of our ocean resources and has been given a lead role in carrying through on the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. Because of the size and breadth of NOAA's involvement in the implementing activities, today I will highlight just a few results from the six sections of the plan. These will demonstrate how NOAA is actively working with federal, state, tribal, and international partners, as well as Congress and other stakeholders, to meet our nation's challenges with respect to the oceans. In addition, I will highlight a few of the legislative priorities that would allow NOAA to improve its effectiveness at addressing issues raised by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy.

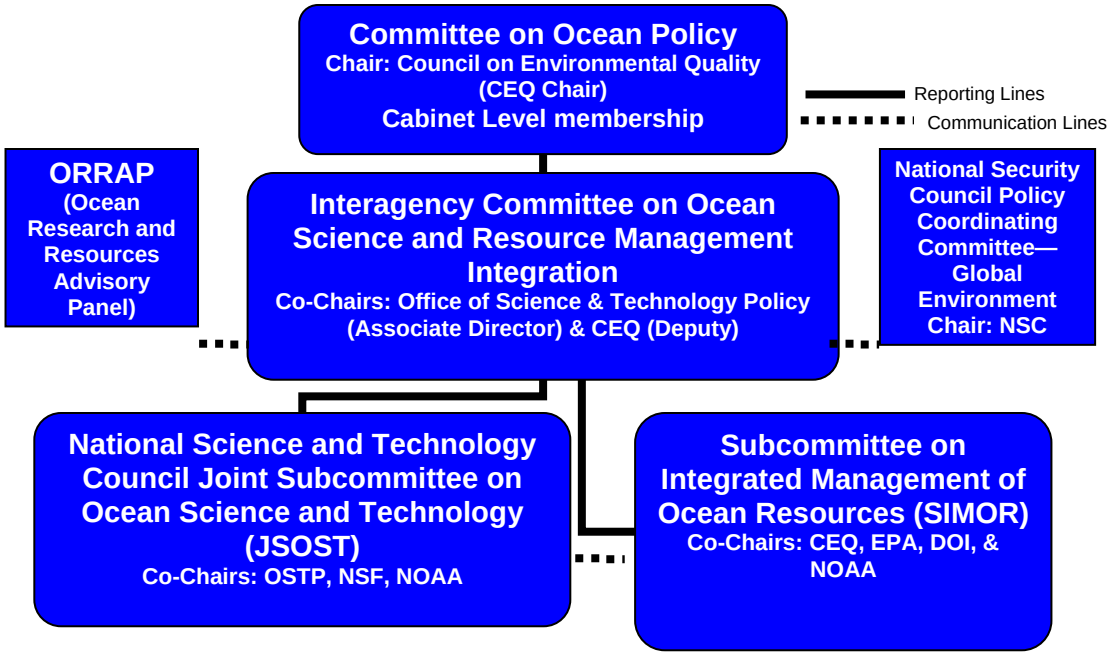
U.S. Ocean Action Plan **— Enhancing Ocean Leadership and Coordination**

Coordinated Ocean Governance Structure

The Committee on Ocean Policy conducts its operational work through the Interagency Committee on Ocean Science and Resource Management Integration (ICOSRMI) and its subordinate bodies, the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR) and the National Science and Technology Council's (NSTC) Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST). Within this new coordinated ocean governance structure (figure 1), ICOSRMI is incorporating the mandate and functions of the National Oceanographic Partnership Program's (NOPP) National Ocean Research Leadership Council (NORLC) into its broader ocean and coastal policy mandate, which now includes ocean resource management. The purpose of a high-level group like the ICOSRMI is to provide oversight to the implementation of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, and direct further actions to advance ocean science and resource management activities. The ICOSRMI is comprised of Under/Assistant Secretaries or their equivalents from the executive branch agencies and departments of the Committee on Ocean Policy, and is co-chaired by the White House's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and Office of Science and Technology Policy. The White House involvement in this effort has been critical to providing the high-level guidance and support necessary to focus the group on achievable goals, and to maintain its momentum, and I play an active role in ICOSRMI and its bimonthly meetings.

In addition to my role in ICOSRMI, NOAA has taken a leadership role in both SIMOR and the JSOST, serving as co-chair on each respective group and further supporting their activities. SIMOR seeks to identify and promote opportunities for collaboration and cooperation among agencies on resource management issues, and to build partnerships among federal, state, tribal, and local authorities, the private sector, international partners, and other interested parties.

Figure1. Coordinated Ocean Governance Structure



SIMOR's counterpart in the new coordinated ocean governance structure is the JSOST. The principal roles of JSOST are to identify national ocean science and technology priorities and to facilitate coordination of disciplinary and interdisciplinary ocean research, ocean technology and infrastructure development, and the development and implementation of the U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). The JSOST was created through expansion of the former NSTC's Joint Subcommittee on Oceans in 2005 to include the issues of science and technology. Because of this evolution, the JSOST continues to report to the NSTC Committee on Science and the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, in addition to the ICOSRMI.

ICOSRMI seeks advice from its federal advisory committee, the Ocean Research and Resource Advisory Panel, comprised of 18 members from academia, as well as the public and private sectors, with interest and expertise in ocean science and resource management. ICOSRMI also coordinates with the National Security Council Policy Coordinating Committee — Global Environment, Subcommittee on Ocean Policy.

NOAA's Implementation of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*

The tenets of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* include: developing management strategies that ensure continued conservation of our ocean, coastal and Great Lakes resources, while at the same time ensuring that the American public enjoys and benefits from them; employing the best science and data to inform decision-making; working toward an ecosystem-based approach to management; and, where possible, employing economic incentives over mandates.

CEQ designated NOAA as lead, or co-lead, on 45 items from the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. The diverse range of actions begun by NOAA to date include developing a status report on deep-sea corals in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, working jointly with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct community workshops to improve watershed protection, and improving navigation by updating the National Water Level Observation Network. NOAA also continues to emphasize the importance of local and regional leadership in ocean management, co-leading with EPA the federal working group supporting the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, participating in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, and joining other SIMOR members in working with interested states to move forward to new regional initiatives such as the Northeast Regional Ocean Council. These regional bodies possess the unique ability to focus discussion on areas of most need, and provide lasting commitments to the stewardship of regional resources by those most affected by them.

Recognizing the continuing need for resource protection, President Bush designated the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a marine national monument on June 15th. Encompassing nearly 140,000 square miles, the monument covers an area larger than all of our national parks put together. This designation builds upon the public sanctuary designation process, and provides lasting protection to this important resource. The creation of the largest marine conservation area in the world is an exciting achievement and recognizes the value of marine resources to our nation.

For the first time in its history, NOAA will play a leading role in managing a national monument. This will be an exciting new opportunity and one that will present many challenges. Thankfully, we will have great partners in the Department of Interior (DOI) and the state of Hawaii to help us as we go forward.

I think President Bush said it best: "You know, in America, there's a great consensus that we have an obligation to be good stewards of the environment. Success of a generation is not defined by wealth alone. We also will be measured by the respect we give to the precious creatures of our natural world. We have great choices before us in this country. And with the designation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Island Marine National Monument, we are making a choice that will leave a precious legacy."

In my view, progress on implementing the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* has been significant as highlighted below and NOAA will continue to work to enhance its partnerships in order to meet present and future challenges.

Legislative Priority — *NOAA Organic Act*

An ocean leadership priority identified in both the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* is the passage of a *NOAA Organic Act.* We believe it is necessary to consolidate into one authorization NOAA's myriad purposes and responsibilities, which now reside in over two hundred separate statues. It should encompass the full spectrum of NOAA's responsibilities, including programs to protect and restore the nation's fisheries, and its responsibilities to provide products that foster safe transportation on marine highways. The Administration transmitted a proposal for such legislation to Congress in April 2005, and we are hopeful that this Committee will play an integral part in its passage. Most importantly, NOAA believes the agency must maintain its current flexibility in determining how best to structure itself to address current and future needs. In responding to the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy thus far, flexibility has proved to be a vital tool for NOAA leadership. An organizational structure that serves the nation well today may not be the best structure to serve the nation in the future. We believe that specific programmatic changes should be made through authorization bills that are revisited every few years. We would be happy to work with the Committee on such bills.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan **— Advancing Our Understanding of the Oceans, Coasts, and Great Lakes**

Ocean Research Priorities Plan

As outlined in the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, an important role of the JSOST within the interagency process is to improve our understanding of oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes by seeking enhanced collaboration, coordination, cooperation, and synergies. JSOST's recent efforts focus on developing an *Ocean Research Priorities Plan* and an *Implementation Strategy* for the plan. This plan will provide strategic direction for future research and articulate priorities among competing demands for scientific information. These documents are being prepared in an open and transparent manner with advice from the ocean research community (government, academic, industry, and other non-government entities), including SIMOR and the National Academy of Sciences. A national workshop with several hundred participants from academia, as well as the public and private sectors, convened earlier this spring to solicit input for the plan. A draft version of this plan will be available to the public and the National Academy of Sciences for review later this summer.

NOAA is undertaking a number of other activities in partnership with external partners or other agencies to enhance our scientific knowledge of marine ecosystems. These include a review of ecosystem science, integrating U.S. ocean observations, ocean and coastal mapping, coordinating ocean education, and hosting a conference on ocean literacy.

NOAA External Ecosystem Science Review

NOAA is currently engaged in an effort, through the NOAA Science Advisory Board, to solicit external input to evaluate and strengthen the structure and function of ecosystem research within NOAA. This will allow NOAA to better address changing needs for ecosystem-based management. The NOAA Science Advisory Board formed an external panel, named the External Ecosystem Task Team, to conduct this external ecosystem science review. The External Ecosystem Task Team recently published a preliminary report on its findings for public comment. NOAA anticipates that the team's final report will assist the agency in identifying the scientific activities conducted, and/or sponsored by NOAA, that meet its ecosystem science needs, including its legislative and regulatory requirements, and will also organize its ecosystem research and science enterprise.

Integrate U.S. Ocean Observing Efforts

The *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* and the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy endorse implementation of a sustained Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). NOAA is pleased that the goals of S. 361, *The Ocean and Coastal Observation System Act of 2005*, passed by the Senate in July 2005, are similar to the Administration's goals outlined in its report to Congress on, *An Integrated and Sustained Ocean Observing System for the United States: Design and Implementation*. These goals are also similar to the ICOSRMI approved planning document, *The First U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System Development Plan.* IOOS is the U.S. component of the Global Ocean Observing System, and is the key ocean component of the U.S. Integrated Earth Observation System (IEOS) now being developed. Both IOOS and IEOS will become part of GEOSS — the Global Earth Observation System of Systems. IOOS is envisioned as an interagency, end-to-end system designed to meet seven societal goals by integrating research, education, and the development of sustained ocean observing capabilities. Ocean.US, the National Office for Integrated and Sustained Ocean Observations, has the lead for planning the multi-agency IOOS effort. NOAA is heavily involved in this planning, and has been designated by the Administration as the lead federal agency for administration and implementation of IOOS. Coordination between agencies will continue to grow as the Interagency Working Group on Ocean Observations (IWGOO), chaired by NOAA with vice chairs from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Navy, and the National Science Foundation (NSF), is established under the JSOST.

NOAA, NASA, NSF and other federal agencies working through the JSOST, in partnership with private sector entities, are actively working on design concepts for IOOS to ensure it meets the varied needs of local, regional, and national users. NOAA has awarded two six-month industry contracts to Lockheed Martin Corporation and Raytheon Corporation. These companies will develop a comprehensive, "end-to-end," conceptual design and cost estimate, along with a narrative explanation, that could help structure NOAA's efforts for implementing IOOS and shape how IOOS fits into GEOSS. To ensure consistency with the broader observing system community, resulting conceptual designs will be structured according to the three IOOS subsystems: data management and communications, national backbone, and regional ocean observing system components coordinated with the IWGOO agencies and other IOOS partners, such as the U.S. IOOS Regional Associations. The two conceptual designs with viability narratives and cost

estimates are expected in early September 2006. Additionally, NOAA has continued to work with regional entities to establish organizational structures that capture local and regional needs. To date, 11 IOOS Regional Associations are working on plans for regional implementation of the IOOS, including the development of Regional Coastal Observing Systems.

Ocean and Coastal Mapping Activities

Improved information on our ocean and coastal areas is essential to improved management and advances in ocean and coastal management and science. NOAA is working with its interagency partners to advance our nation's capabilities in this area, taking advantage of new technologies such as LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and autonomous underwater vehicles. Among its efforts, NOAA is working to ensure the most effective use of our fleet of research vessels and aircraft by integrating our multiple program mapping requirements, developing new techniques for data acquisition, working with other agencies, and making seamless the use of our mapping missions. We are building a Geographic Information System support tool to be able to better plan and integrate mapping efforts in order to narrow the gaps between current program mapping capability, and a modern fully integrated ocean mapping system. The goal is to meet the broadest range of program needs and eliminate duplicative efforts in NOAA's ocean and coastal mapping activities. In addition, NOAA is working with other agencies to develop an inventory of coastal and ocean mapping programs, their existing data, and planned acquisitions, along with a Web-based system to search and display records from the inventory.

Increase Ocean Education Coordination

Together, SIMOR and the JSOST have formed the joint Interagency Working Group on Ocean Education, to identify opportunities and articulate priorities for enhancing ocean education, outreach, and capacity building. Improved ocean management requires an ocean literate public and, to this end, NOAA is committed to advancing lifelong ocean education. Our formal and informal activities include scholarship and fellowship programs, education and research grants, and strategic partnerships with education institutions and industry. In 2005, NOAA provided scholarship and internship opportunities to over 150 undergraduate students and 57 graduate scholarship opportunities. In 2005, 28 teachers participated in NOAA's Teacher at Sea Program. NOAA's education investment is also geared towards hiring students trained through these scholarship and internship opportunities. Through June 15th, NOAA had hired 31 students trained through its Graduate Sciences Program.

To raise national attention to the need for ocean literacy, NOAA, with EPA, DOI, NSF, NASA, and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, co-hosted CoOl — the Conference on Ocean Literacy — on June 7-8, 2006, in Washington, D.C., as part of the presidentially proclaimed National Oceans Week, June 4-10. The conference brought together key participants to discuss the essential principles of ocean literacy, and the current challenges and opportunities for both formal and informal education efforts in educating the public to make informed, responsible decisions about the ocean and its resources. This partnership event also identified priority next steps we can take to

advance ocean literacy. The conference extended beyond Washington, D.C., through five regional workshops hosted by aquariums across the country including: Aquarium of the Pacific, Long Beach, CA; John G. Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, IL; J.L. Scott Aquarium, Ocean Springs, MS; National Aquarium in Baltimore, Baltimore, MD; and National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, Dubuque, IA. Each site viewed portions of the presentations via satellite and discussed regional challenges and opportunities for promoting ocean literacy principles.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan **— Enhancing the Use and Conservation of Ocean, Coastal, and Great Lakes Resources**

SIMOR Work Plan

Established as part of the Committee on Ocean Policy, SIMOR provides a strong mechanism to coordinate federal activities and respond to regional concerns, and is jointly co-chaired by NOAA, EPA, DOI, and CEQ. It has fostered mutual interest and proactive dialog among agencies in addressing difficult resource management issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries. SIMOR has developed a work plan with 21 actions that build on the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. NOAA has a leadership role in 12 of these actions and participates in nearly all of the others. Examples of the benefits of SIMOR activities include: improved understanding of an ecosystem approach to management through regional workshops, and the development of educational standards for resource managers; coordinated federal support to new and ongoing regional partnerships; and formation of a federal/state team of resource managers to provide timely input into the JSOST's, and development of the *Ocean Research Priorities Plan*.

Implement *Coral Reef Local Action Strategies*

The federal agencies and seven jurisdictions (Florida, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands) that comprise the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, as well as the freely associated states, have developed and begun implementing *Coral Reef Local Action Strategies* to address key threats to coral reefs in their respective jurisdictions. The action strategies provide a framework for Task Force member agencies to identify, and collaboratively address, these threats and additional local needs, connect local priorities to national goals, and coordinate federal agency actions with local management of reef resources. This effort is a significant step forward in advancing the goal of cooperative conservation between the federal, state, territorial, and commonwealth governments. NOAA, DOI, EPA, and the Department of Agriculture have been key partners in implementing the action strategy effort and building local capacity for coral reef conservation and management. For example, agencies organized a successful Caribbean Coral Reef Grants and Funding Opportunities Workshop in August 2005 to help state and local partners identify and pursue funding opportunities for local action strategy support. A Coral Reef Grants Funding Workshop was held in late June 2006 for Hawaii that was organized by local agencies and highlighted priority projects. Similar workshops will be held in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Legislative Priority — Reauthorization of *Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act*

A number of actions highlighted within the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* intend to improve coordination and effectiveness of marine fisheries management activities. Reauthorization of the *Magnuson-Stevens Act* is a high priority of the Administration and I would like to thank the Members of this Committee, and the Senate, for your leadership in recently passing the reauthorization of the *Magnuson-Stevens Act*. My hope is that we will soon see similar action taken in the House.

Legislative Priority — *National Offshore Aquaculture Act*

In June 2005, the Administration released its *National Offshore Aquaculture Act.* Subsequently, Senator Stevens introduced S. 1195. Since that time, this Committee hosted a hearing on the bill in April 2006, and a second hearing on June 8, 2006. Enactment of S. 1195 will provide the Department of Commerce the authority to regulate aquaculture in federal waters, and to establish a coordinated process among the federal agencies. We envision a one-stop regulatory shop, coordinated by NOAA, and integrated into NOAA's environmental stewardship responsibilities. I appreciate the work and leadership of this Committee to move legislation forward to allow NOAA to begin a public rulemaking process to produce a comprehensive, environmentally sound permitting and regulatory program for aquaculture in federal waters.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan **— Managing Coasts and Their Watersheds**

Gulf of Mexico Alliance

One example of SIMOR's role in enhancing coordination on managing coasts and watersheds is the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. In response to priorities articulated by the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, this initiative brought together 13 agencies under the leadership of NOAA and EPA. The Alliance formally released the *Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts* at the Gulf of Mexico Summit in March 2006, which includes 11 key actions across the Alliance's five priority issues; water quality, restoration, environmental education, habitat identification for management purposes, and reductions in nutrient loadings. In order to capture local community input during the development of the *Governors' Action Plan*, the Gulf Alliance hosted a series of eight Community Workshops across the five U.S. Gulf States from June 2005, to February 2006. Some of the expected outcomes from this effort are improvement in Gulf water quality, with an emphasis on healthy beaches and shellfish beds, and restoration and conservation of coastal wetlands.

Cooperative Conservation Executive Order

The Administration remains committed to the tenets of Cooperative Conservation, as outlined in the executive order of two years ago. Last year, at the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation, NOAA announced a new grants program to aid communities in removing small obstructions to their rivers. The goal of the Open Rivers Initiative (ORI) is to not only improve habitat for diadramous fish populations, but also

foster new economic development opportunities. In addition to ORI, NOAA will continue to find new and innovative ways to advance Cooperative Conservation throughout the agency.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan **— Supporting Marine Transportation**

Interagency Committee on the Marine Transportation System

Consistent with the final report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* called for the elevation of the previous federal interagency marine transportation effort — the Interagency Committee on the Marine Transportation System — and directed the creation of a Cabinet-level interagency committee on marine transportation. As a result the Committee on the Marine Transportation System (CMTS), an interagency committee with 14 member agencies and chaired by the Secretary of Transportation, was established in April 2005. I am proud to say that the Department of Commerce, with strong representation by NOAA, is a charter member of the CMTS, and actively supports its mission. The purpose of the CMTS is to promote a partnership of federal agencies with responsibility for the Marine Transportation System (MTS) — waterways, ports, and their intermodal connections — to ensure the development and implementation of national MTS policies, and to communicate to the President its views and recommendations for improving the MTS.

The CMTS is executing a work plan that will provide a comprehensive assessment of the MTS; development of an MTS national strategy; improved collection and management of MTS data; and development of a decision making matrix for improved coordination and response to natural disasters affecting the nation's MTS.

U.S. Ocean Action Plan **— Advancing International Ocean Policy and Science**

Advance the Use of Large Marine Ecosystems

The *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* included a chapter on implementing international efforts. Several of the action items in the *Ocean Action Plan* include international components. However, as many of today's challenges to our oceans and coasts are transboundary and international in nature and scope, the *Plan* also includes a section that addresses the advancement of international ocean policy and science. One example of these efforts is a new partnership that has been developed to link the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Seas Programme and the use of the NOAA-originated concept of Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs). This partnership acts as a tool for enabling ecosystem-based management to provide a collaborative approach to management of resources within ecologically bounded transnational areas. This effort has attracted funding from the Global Environmental Facility and various donor countries, specifically focusing on capacity building in the developing world. LME sponsored projects are underway in 10 regions involving 70 countries, and seven new projects are planned with an additional 51 countries participating. NOAA has contributed in-kind technical expertise to assist the planning and implementation of these programs.

2007 Budget Priorities

NOAA continues to streamline activities and shift priorities to support and implement the President's *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*. Legislative action on the priorities identified could greatly enhance NOAA's ability to implement the activities outlined within the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan.* While NOAA is realizing efficiencies in programs through partnering with federal, state, local, and international entities, NOAA has also identified a need for additional budget support to fully implement activities of interest to this Committee. I would like to thank the Senate for the support you have recently shown NOAA through the appropriations process. NOAA appreciates your continued support for our programs as we execute our responsibilities under the U.S. Ocean Action Plan and work together to improve our products and services for the American people. These resources are vital to meeting the challenges facing our nation's oceans.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance of the efforts of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, and stress that NOAA is strongly committed to continued implementation of the related recommendations of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, as well as through improvements in existing program management and partnerships. NOAA will continue to work with its partners in a collaborative and systematic fashion, as we believe collaboration is critical to the ongoing development of our national ocean policy. We look forward to continuing to work with the members of the Committee in raising the bar for the long-term conservation and management of our coastal and ocean resources.

Thank you again for your time and I am happy to answer any questions that the Members of the Committee may have.