

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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HALEY BARBOUR  
GOVERNOR

June 3, 2004

Admiral James D. Watkins  
Chair, U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy  
1120 20th Street, NW (Suite 200 North)  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Admiral Watkins,

Congratulations to your U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy for producing an outstanding Report, one that will benefit this Nation for years to come. I look forward to contributing to the implementation of this Report and am anxious to help support it on all levels. In addition to the national and international implications, the recommended new programs and policies will result in substantial benefit on the state level. From Mississippi's perspective, I offer the following suggestions intended to ensure we achieve the goals outlined in your Report:

1) The Stennis Space Center, located on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, hosts one of the greatest concentrations of oceanographers and ocean-related activity in the world, including the Naval Oceanographic Office (NAVO), the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), several divisions of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and a campus of the University of Southern Mississippi (USM). Numerous improvements (e.g., strengthening NOAA, improving ocean education and research, and coordinating information management) cited in the Report are natural extensions of programs already in place with the Navy, NOAA, NASA, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the twenty-two ocean-related programs of Stennis. The Commission's Report emphasizes the necessity of coordinating and integrating the various federal, state, and local coastal and ocean programs. The facilities and activities at Stennis make it the ideal place to begin this process in earnest for both regional and national programs. I strongly encourage the Commission, the President and the Congress to make Stennis central to the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

- a. The coalitions and shared facilities at Stennis can be further enhanced to create a marine science community that will assume a critical role in the national coastal and ocean infrastructure and technology strategy.
- b. The Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) should be funded through NOAA, including the creation of joint NOAA/Navy ocean and coastal information management and communication program office. This is a natural extension of the extant programs at Stennis and it would build on these successes.
- c. NOAA should create an Office of Technology at Stennis to expedite the transition of experimental technologies into operational applications, an activity that is currently accomplished by NRL and NAVO for the Navy at this site.
- d. NOAA and the Navy should establish a prototype joint ocean and coastal information management system at Stennis to build on the successful programs

already extant there. Specifically, NOAA's National Coastal Data Development Center (NCDDC) and National Data Buoy Center (NDBC), NASA's Earth Science Applications program, as well as the Navy's NRL and NAVO are all currently maintaining and building complementary programs at Stennis and stand ready to develop the synergy that is needed. The only impediments to this success are the difficulty in merging funds from several Federal agencies and the organizational tasking required to do so. I support the Report's specific procedures for eliminating these hurdles.

e. Congress should amend and fund the National Ocean Partnership Act to, among other things, work with existing supercomputer centers, such as the one at NAVO/Stennis, to develop a plan for handling, accessing, and archiving the large amounts of data anticipated from the IOOS.

2) I support the Report's overarching education and outreach recommendations to establish a national ocean education office (Ocean.ED) under the National Ocean Council. I specifically support the recommendations to increase and sustain funding for the ocean sciences education efforts in which Mississippi is a national leader, including the Center for Ocean Sciences Education (COSEE), development of curricular materials for use by the Nation's primary and secondary schools, establishing effective relationships between the science and education communities, and promoting partnerships among public and private institutions. Mississippi's leadership role in this arena includes the following facilities: the Museum of Natural Sciences in Jackson, Biloxi's Seafood Industry Museum, USM's J.L. Scott Marine Education Center and Aquarium (MEC&A) in Biloxi, the Mississippi State University Water Resources Research Institute in Starkville, the National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) "national" office at the MEC&A, the Gulf Islands National Seashore Visitor Center in Ocean Springs, and the science and education center, INFINITY, at Stennis Space Center.

3) As your Report states, due to budget constraints on both State and Federal levels oceanic research infrastructure has been allowed to decline. These facilities are critical to the collection of data and performance of research that are required for the implementation of the Report recommendations. Mississippi scientists and policy makers have contributed significantly to these efforts, and I anticipate increased participation in the future. Mississippi stands ready to continue to build NOAA ships in our shipyards, to provide an educated workforce for Federal laboratories and university research facilities, and to provide expertise associated with the IOOS implementation.

4) In addition to these major issues, the State of Mississippi is poised to contribute to and benefit from the following initiatives:

a. Mariculture: Mississippi is blessed with a variety of natural habitats and access to others beyond our State waters, and Mississippi scientists have been involved in several research efforts to evaluate the potential for aquaculture in our State. Mississippi universities and private firms have established successful programs for raising redfish, shrimp, striped bass, flounder, blackfish, and red snapper.

- b. The Report recognizes the connection between the health and quality of marine waters and the health of the human population. I support investigating these connections and developing viable solutions as recommended by the Commission.
- c. Tourism contributes heavily to Mississippi's economy, as it does in most coastal states. To draw visitors to our coastal attractions and offer them the opportunity to experience our scenic natural resources, the industry relies on a healthy coast and ocean. Mississippi is interested in some of the Report's recommended initiatives aimed at improving water quality.

5) With regard to specific recommendations, I will comment on four below:

- a. I agree that the major recommendation regarding the creation of a National Ocean Council (NOC) is of significant importance. Ocean policy and regulations are currently established and enforced by a maze of federal and state agencies with both overlaps and gaps in jurisdiction. Creation of the NOC will reduce the confusion and enhance our ability to both utilize and conserve our marine resources.
- b. I also agree with your recommended establishment of Regional Councils to support the National Ocean Council, and I suggest that a pilot or demonstration Regional Council be established for the Gulf of Mexico Region. This can build on the organizational efforts currently underway as part of the GCOOS (Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System) initiative but would be expanded to include all areas and relevant expertise.
- c. I agree that strengthening NOAA, the Nation's premier ocean agency, makes sense and is overdue. This funding should include line items for funding the IOOS and other initiatives to be accomplished through partnerships and collaborations as noted above. NOAA will become the lead agency for a variety of issues (e.g. Marine mammal protection) and should be empowered and funded accordingly.
- d. I support the implementation of ecosystem-based management of sustainable fisheries and other resources, a concept that is overdue, yet challenging to achieve. Mississippi has a plethora of agencies, institutions, educational facilities and organizations that are anxious to contribute to the implementation of this policy.

6) Lastly, I have concerns that a few recommendations, if not implemented carefully, might become unfunded mandates and financial burdens to the states. Furthermore, it is crucial that any new or expanded regulatory requirements that may result from the Commission's findings, especially in regard to environmental requirements, be based on sound science with special attention given to honest costs-benefit analyses. Specific concerns are:

- a. The habitat restoration and conservation initiatives included in recommendation 11-2 are classed under the Regional Council responsibilities and could therefore be considered to be a state responsibility unless more precise wording is included.
- b. The security of our Nation's seaports against terrorist activities, as listed in recommendation 13-6 is of vital concern to all citizens both near our ports and beyond. Given the widespread impacts of this problem and its relation to

interstate and international commerce, port security funding should be a primary responsibility of the Federal government.

c. Several of the recommendations relating to the Environmental Protection Agency raise concerns, including the requirement to remove nutrients from wastewater treatment plant discharges and from animal wastes and the stricter enforcement of water quality standards for the reduction of pathogens. If these recommendations are proven necessary, Federal funding should be identified to offset the cost to the states should they be implemented.

d. Recommendations relative to watershed management (14-3,4,5,6,13), where states are required to establish regulatory controls on animal wastes, repair and expand wastewater and drinking water infrastructure, and establish programs to address non-point source pollution, if proven necessary, must have Federal support if they are to be implemented.

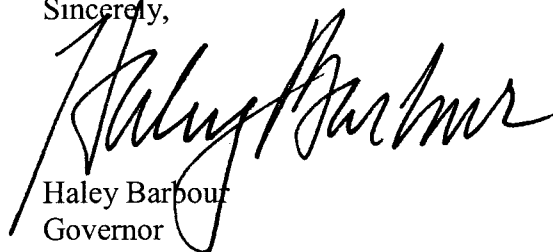
e. Recommendation 16-10 would require stricter standards in the sulfur oxide emissions associated with the combustion of fuel oil under marine commerce. While I agree with the need to protect our atmosphere, I am concerned about the impacts of these restrictions on our port activities.

f. The recommendations in chapter 19 dealing with a regional approach to fisheries management are well founded and necessary, but again, raise the potential for requiring the states to bear the burden of establishing, regulating, and enforcing these policies.

g. Finally, I support U.S. Army Corps of Engineers initiatives suggested by the Report recommending the beneficial use of dredge material, developing regional dredging and disposal plans, and improved overall management of sediments, but again am concerned regarding the assignment of funding responsibility.

In summary, I support the majority of the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report and look forward to working with your Commission and with Congress to implement these beneficial programs. I am pleased to note that Mississippi's abundant capacity and superb capabilities in oceanography have unlimited potential for future enhancements and are available to be fully included and utilized in the implementation process. This Report represents the most significant opportunity for substantive improvement in U.S. ocean policy in over 30 years, and I am strongly interested in the opportunities it presents to our great State and Nation.

Sincerely,



Haley Barbour  
Governor

GHB/jr

CC: Mississippi Congressional Delegation

*Jim*  
*I'm personally interested in this, and my State is committed to helping all we can - Haley*