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**10,000 years in our Traditional Homeland, Prince William Sound, the Copper River Delta, & the Gulf of Alaska**

U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy  
1120 20<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Suite 200 North  
Washington, D.C. 20036

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept our comments regarding the Critical Recommended Actions outlined in the U.S. Commissions Executive Summary Report on U.S. Ocean Policy.

The Native Village of Eyak is the largest federally recognized Native tribe in our region with a tribal membership of approximately 500 individuals. Our traditional Tribal Territory extends throughout PrinceWilliam Sound, the Copper River and the Gulf of Alaska.

In 1997 the Native Village of Eyak, or NVE, began a formal environmental program within our region. We have focused our attention mainly on Marine issues and resources, and indeed our highest environmental priority as a tribe is water quality. We have considered ourselves stewards of the sea in our area since time immemorial, and continue to be involved.

Our tribe utilizes marine resources as a primary source of subsistence foods, travel within the region, commercial fishing livelihoods, recreational, and spiritual values. Therefore, it is in our tribe's best interest to be involved to the highest extent possible with any policy changes to the Oceans which gave us life and continue to sustain us economically, nutritionally and spiritually.

**A New National Ocean Policy Framework:** Our comment regarding this component of the report have to do mainly with the increased involvement of tribal organizations as it relates to decision making at the state and federal levels. Our tribe is increasingly involved with marine policy and fisheries management concepts, and we have government to government relationships with various entities that control marine resources. These relationships are documented in the form of MOU's and MOA's with the State of Alaska, EPA, Forest Service, BIA, and the City of Cordova, among others. We conduct our own Tribal fisheries research, and have been called upon to provide our expertise cleaning up oil spills. Due to the fact that many of our Tribal members are commercial fishermen, subsistence users, and rely heavily upon Marine resources, we request that we be involved as a stakeholder in this process, and request a seat on the Presidential Advisory Committee that is formed due to this policy. We agree that improving federal leadership and coordination is essential as the World's oceans become more impacted by human use, and we would like to provide our centuries of Ocean stewardship experience, and take an active role in reforming the way that various management agencies and management tools are utilized in our area. We have already come a long way in developing regional goals and priorities, improving response to critical issues, and building capacity to protect our resources from degradation. Building a new framework for policy -making fits very well with our continued effort to become increasingly involved with Marine issues.

**Strengthen Science and Meet Information Needs:** As previously mentioned we are involved with many aspects of marine science. Our tribe conducts studies related to the commercial and subsistence use of salmon; life history, abundance estimates, early season indexing using state of the art sonar, tagging and tracking, and water quality issues as they relate to the health of salmon habitat. We have one of the most viable and sustainable commercial fisheries in North America, and indeed the Copper River salmon are sought after worldwide. Any science that is conducted regarding the status of our marine environment is of interest to us, and we are in a strong position to facilitate and encourage an increase in high quality information that will help us and other managers of these resources when making decisions at a regional level. We would like to see money allocated to tribes and other local governments who already study these precious resources, and an opportunity to work directly with the federal government in crafting new research protocols for studying the marine environment in our area. An increase in funding to study the impacts to fish, shellfish, and other marine resources from other development, is necessary as the World's oceans become increasingly utilized.

We agree with the commitment to spend 138 million initially on an Integrated Ocean Observing System, and would like to support the U.S. Ocean Commission in its request to Congress to allocate funds to observe, monitor, and forecast ocean conditions. We believe that this action in itself will be a positive step in the right direction towards a more ecosystem-based approach to Ocean management.

**Enhance Ocean Education:** Traditional knowledge of resource use and life histories of marine species is often overlooked when creating curriculum for education regarding ocean ecosystem science and management. Native Village of Eyak requests that Native knowledge be included in this component of the Commissions new Policy, and we will offer what information we can in order to facilitate this process. One of the goals we have developed regionally is to provide better scientific understanding of our resources to the various decision makers and managers, and this has been successful with our salmon science projects. We would be very interested in being involved at a higher level in regards to increasing collaboration between our tribe and the federal government when it is appropriate. Our tribal youth need resources available to them to become educated on regional and international ocean issues, and funding to facilitate that process in the form of increased scholarships and financial aid to Native youth interested in marine science is a long-term goal of ours. In order to cultivate a broad public ethic of stewardship on the oceans, we need to start with youth in each region, and provide them with what they need to become and stay involved with issues in their own ecosystems.

In conclusion, the Native Village of Eyak respectfully requests that we be involved as a partner in this worthwhile endeavor, and we would like a seat at the table when the Presidential Committee is formed. We are key participants in the management and protection of our local resources, and believe that our experience would be a valuable addition to this effort. We hope that Congress realizes the importance of this process, and we would like to commend the Ocean Commission on their foresight and initiative. Thank you for allowing us the chance to participate as a tribal government in your visionary mission to monitor, protect and restore the Earth's oceans.

Sincerely,

Bruce Cain  
Executive Director  
Native Village of Eyak