



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Mark R. Warner
Governor

June 7, 2004

Admiral James D. Watkins
U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
1120 20th Street, N.W.
Suite 300 North
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Admiral Watkins:

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the "Blueprint for Change". It is apparent that you have led an important effort to focus the nation's attention on our oceans and coastal resources and I commend the work of the Commission. Virginia is dependent on our coastal lands and waters. About 63% of Virginians live in our coastal zone, but the coastal zone is only about 22% of our land area. Despite the past 20 years of efforts to protect coastal resources, we continue to experience declines in fisheries, water quality, and habitat. As current Chairman of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Executive Council, I have struggled with these difficult management issues and I have come to the conclusion that the overriding need is for greater resources and investment in support of our coastal and ocean resources. Until we begin to treat our natural resources as "capital" with an economic value rather than limitless "free" services, the deterioration of our resources will continue. In hindsight, the Commission perhaps should have been named the Commission on Ocean and Coastal Resource Policy for it is clear that the two are inextricably linked.

FUNDING

In order to sustain these resources I believe it is critical that the level of investment be commensurate with their value to Virginians and to the American people. As your report mentions, the economic value of our coasts and oceans is in the trillions of dollars, yet our investment in key programs that aim to protect those assets numbers only in the millions. In response to my request for comment by Virginia's Coastal Management Program partners, the one topic on which all agreed was that current levels of funding

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were grossly insufficient to reverse the current trends of coastal deterioration. While we agree with doubling the \$650 million national budget for ocean research, it is even more important to at least double or triple budgets for on-the-ground management efforts such as called for in the Coastal Zone Management Act. The current national budget for state coastal management programs is a mere \$79 million, about an order of magnitude less than the current research budget.

I strongly support amending the CZMA to authorize and fund the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program. Funds for coastal land acquisition are desperately needed. Acquisition is our strongest protection tool and has the most lasting impact on water quality and habitat protection. We also support amending relevant legislation to allow for greater discretion in using a portion of habitat acquisition funding for monitoring, research and education. These funds are necessary to effectively manage the coastal lands acquired.

Many of your commission's recommendations provide lofty goals for changes that can only occur at the local government level. Specific objectives and action steps now need to be developed to ensure that these goals can be achieved. How will these recommendations actually be translated into changes in local planning and zoning ordinances? As experienced by the Chesapeake Bay Program, it is difficult to provide a catalyst for change at the local level without either providing adequate funds for pilot demonstration projects or for mandating changes through new regulations.

In Virginia, existing programs such as the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act in Virginia require changes to local comprehensive plans and ordinances to ensure that land development decisions do not result in water quality degradation. These types of programs should be better supported and, indeed, enhanced since they will help meet many of the recommendations found in Chapters 9 Managing Coasts and their Watersheds and Chapter 14 Addressing Coastal Water Pollution. Adequate funding to support implementation of existing environmental management programs may even eliminate the need for new initiatives.

WATER QUALITY

I am pleased at the attention the report gives to addressing coastal water pollution. We have embarked, along with our Chesapeake Bay Program partners, on actions necessary to make dramatic reductions in nutrient and sediments entering the Chesapeake Bay watershed. I strongly support the recommendations contained in Chapter 14. I want to

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particularly commend the Commission for its attention to addressing nonpoint source pollution issues that, as you know, are the most difficult to control.

EDUCATION

I strongly endorse the Commission's recommendations in Chapter 8 for improvements in education and public awareness. Without the public's understanding of the value of our ocean and coastal resources, there is little hope of securing their support in investing in resource protection. We need to do more such as providing meaningful lifelong educational experiences, establishing a strong collaborative network of educators and scientists and facilitating on-the-ground opportunities for citizens and students to restore coastal habitats such as wetlands, oyster reefs and underwater grass beds. These are all activities of our Virginia Naturally Environmental Education Program, but more needs to be done to make environmental education and awareness mainstream.

DATA AVAILABILITY

I strongly support the Commission's recommendations for Ocean.US, Ocean.IT and IOOS and suggest strengthening the language of the recommendations to ensure that new data and science is based on the needs of coastal managers. These programs would complement the Virginia Coastal Program's Blue-Green Infrastructure Internet Mapping System Initiative and are very much in line with types of Information Technology advances that I have advocated here in Virginia. I also strongly support Recommendation 25-3, which calls for greater examination of human dimensions and economic value of our oceans and coasts. Without economic data and understanding of social constraints, it is difficult to gain public support for resource protection.

The key to better resource management is having good, scientific information on which to base decisions. Although there are gaps in our current state of knowledge, by making it easy to access data already collected (by federal agencies, universities, management programs etc.) we could identify gaps in our current state of knowledge and significantly improve coastal management decision efforts. We also suggest developing an accessible, on-line national clearinghouse of coastal management tools and publications so states can avoid duplication of efforts.

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FEDERAL AGENCY AND REGIONAL COORDINATION

I support creation of a National Ocean Council to coordinate and provide high-level attention to ocean and coastal resource policy, but most effective will be strengthening NOAA and consolidating existing ocean and coastal management programs within NOAA. Virginia relies on an effective networked partnership through its Coastal Management Program similar to the proposed NOC, not only to manage its coastal and ocean resources but also to foster awareness and appreciation of these resources.

Integration of existing state, federal and local programs is critical to effective management of coastal and ocean resources. Such integration would be extremely desirable in the area of state/federal non-point source pollution efforts. We also support coordinated offshore management regimes and the use of Marine Protected (or "Managed") Areas as a tool for protecting public trust lands and waters. These areas should be well-defined and monitored as part of a larger management regime.

Providing for better coordination among agencies at all levels of government should enhance efforts to manage and protect ocean and coastal resources. Further program integration should take priority over creation of new management systems. However program integration does need to take into account the differences in regulatory structure, legal authority and financing among the states.

Regional coordination needs to be addressed at a scale that is smaller than the multi-state fisheries management approach to regionalism. We support regional coordination although we must be careful not to create additional layers of bureaucracy. We must take into account existing regional programs such as the interstate Chesapeake Bay Program.

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

Directing fisheries management toward an ecosystem approach bolsters the direction Virginia is taking in association with the Chesapeake Bay Program, including the development of multispecies and ecosystem-based Fishery Management Plans.

Any change to offshore or federal management of aquaculture activities in coastal waters (including areas involving state waters and submerged lands) should take into account existing state management and leasing authorities such as exist in Virginia.

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your preliminary report. I acknowledge that many of the recommendations in the report chart broad policies. As with all the work of government, the devil is in the details. Therefore I look forward to continuing conversations on how to fully implement your ambitious recommendations. I wish you every success in making this report the new "Blueprint for Change" in how America manages its priceless coastal and ocean treasures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark R. Warner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark R. Warner

