



National Association of Marine Laboratories
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James D. Watkins
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)
Chairman
U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
1120 20th Street, NW
Suite 200 North
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Admiral Watkins:

This is a somewhat delayed response to your letter of March 7, which contained several additional follow-up questions regarding my testimony at the January meeting in Charleston, SC. Because of the size of the membership of the National Association of Marine Laboratories (NAML), it has taken time to formulate a response that appropriately reflected our membership. Our responses to the three questions posed are attached.

We continue to wish you well in the very important work of the Ocean Commission.

Sincerely,

Madilyn Fletcher

Follow-Up Questions for the National Association of Marine Laboratories

Question: Do the NAML/SAML institutions consider that there has been growth in Federal Agency labs at the expense of basic research in academic research institutions?

Response: Because of the great diversity in NAML/SAML laboratories, there is really no single answer to this question. There is the perception among some of our laboratories, however, that the development of academic laboratories has *not kept pace* with that of federal laboratories. It is equally difficult to generalize across agencies. For example, while a number of agencies have increased investment in their laboratories, the EPA moved in the opposite direction with the creation of its STAR grants program, which moved funding from intramural agency research into academic research.

Question: How can we better share the load of research and operations between academic/research labs and the Federal agencies? Would this lead to better management of marine resources?

Response: The Federal research laboratories may be better able to sustain research directions over longer time periods than academic institutions, while conversely the academic institutions are more flexible. Federal laboratories may be better able to respond quickly to “catastrophic” needs that are in line with agency priorities, while academic laboratories can respond more readily perhaps to emerging research opportunities. Finding ways to streamline the ability of agency laboratories to cooperate with and fund academic partners would better combine the strengths of both parties.

There are some good models for fostering productive collaborations, and these should be expanded. The exchange of scientists between Federal and academic laboratories and the co-location of federal and academic scientists in organizations such as Cooperative Institutes are extremely valuable for establishing synergistic activities. In addition, the joint training of students through internships or graduate fellowship programs not only fosters interactions among supervising scientists, but also helps to produce a well-trained workforce that provides connectivity between strong research and its application to real-world problems.

More cooperative research would strengthen the overall quality of research activities. Among our members, the point has also been made that the quality of Federal laboratory research would benefit from more external review of internal research funds. With higher quality information, there is the potential for better management of marine resources, but this will not be accomplished without the mechanisms for channeling that information into the policy making process.

Question: How can we ensure that the various NAML/SAML and other various consortia of academic institutions coordinate their activities better?

Response: There is already much communication among the various laboratories, and many platforms for networking and coordination are already in place. We are unable to suggest additional mechanisms for facilitating coordination, apart continuing the current trend of program funding that targets multidisciplinary research and partnership programs.