

Testimony of Mr. John Turner
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Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, it's certainly an honor and a pleasure and a privilege for me to appear before you today.

The State Department continues to follow the work of this Commission closely and we believe your efforts to be extremely important as we all indeed look to the future.

As you pointed out, Mr. Chairman, we feel now is a particularly good time to discuss international aspects of ocean policy especially in light of the recent conclusion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. And I know that the Commission had a briefing from CEQ Chairman Jim Connaughton, so I will not discuss the WSSD plan of implementation in detail, but would like to have my comments follow up on a number of themes that did emerge from Johannesburg.

Because oceans and their resources do not recognize national boundaries, I think we all recognize that international cooperation is necessary to resolve most ocean issues. Forces and events on the high seas, as I know everyone here realizes, along the coast or on the high seas in other areas of the world, can often impact U.S. economic interests and our American marine ecosystem. And I believe the American public recognizes this fact. A recent poll found that 93 percent of Americans believe that, quote, a healthy ocean with plentiful and diverse marine life and habitat, quote, is personally important to them.

Even when told that only 2 percent of the world's coral reefs are in U.S. waters, 85 percent thought it important for the U.S. to take a leadership role in protecting the world's coral reef resources.

Issues related to high seas outside EEZs such as overfishing can only be addressed through international cooperation, often by binding agreements backed up by enforcement and monitoring schemes. Management of resources in areas within 200 miles also requires cooperation because many countries don't have the ability to manage those areas -- and I've witnessed that personally recently.

For example, as I'm sure Commissioners realize, approximately 90 percent of the world's fish catch is within the 200-mile EEZs. Yet most developed countries simply don't have the resources or ability to manage those resources effectively.

I think we would all agree that U.S. leadership is essential and should take several forms. First, we obviously need to be a model ourselves. We must practice at home what we want others to practice abroad.

The Commission's recommendations are critically important in putting us in a position to be leaders in the future in this respect. For example, the plan of action from the World

Summit calls for implementation of an ecosystem approach to oceans. Yet, I think we would admit that the U.S. and many other nations are only beginning to understand what that means in terms of management. We need to be forward looking domestically in developing such approaches so that we can join with others internationally in applying these practices.

Second, we must continue to work the international forums to develop treaties and non-binding instruments necessary to address oceans issues. We must induce the major players to accept these agreements, then we must implement them. For example, by continuing our aggressive port state control program and by pushing for greater flag state controls, especially in the context of IUU fishing.

Key to World Summit actions, for example, regarding the IMO, as you heard at your Chicago meeting, the U.S. remains cautiously optimistic that a global ballast water treaty to help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species will be completed at a diplomatic conference in late 2003 or early 2004. At the last IMO meeting in October we made progress in advancing the U.S. position on these issues.

Second, the U.S. has also proposed a comprehensive package of regulations to bolster maritime security on ships and in ports, which the IMO will complete in December and is certainly crucial during these times. Of critical importance are the regional fishery management organizations and bilateral agreements. With extensive U.S. participation, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention was completed. We are now working on rules of procedure and subsidiary issues. The key now will be to get wide acceptance of the treaty and effective implementation.

We are currently renegotiating the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Convention to expand membership and update the mandate of the organization, since the original convention was adopted back in the 1940s. The U.S. needs to maintain its leadership role in many other fisheries organizations including ICCAT, the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna; in NASCO, the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization; and also the Pacific Salmon Commission; and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The U.S. continues its leadership to promote implementation of a global plan of action for land-based sources of pollution, but much work remains and the U.S. must be committed to its leadership role, particularly regarding municipal waste water and sewage.

There's also the Law of the Sea Convention, which I want to thank the Commission for coming out early for. The U.S. continues to work to ensure that the jurisdictional principles of the LOS continue to constitute rule of law in the oceans. As the Commission recognized last fall, U.S. accession to the convention would assist us in ensuring that the rules of that convention continue to apply in the oceans in a manner that protects U.S. interests.

Third, we must be creative in finding new ways to address problems such as through work in the WTO to reduce or eliminate subsidies that contribute to overfishing and overcapacity.

Finally, as a nation with many resources we must actively engage in capacity building for others to enable them to manage their coastal areas and resources. Our White Water to Blue Water initiative is one such example.

In her testimony before you last year, Ambassador West of our bureau gave a detailed description of State's role as facilitator and coordinator for U.S. international oceans issues, working in conjunction with agencies with programmatic responsibility – and our nation's leadership role in international oceans issues.

Today I have given you a few examples of what that leadership can and should achieve. Many other examples exist such as the Arctic Council, the International Coral Reef Initiative, the Oceans Research Operations Initiative including the global oceans observation system, and in the work we've done on the interaction between fishing and animals such as sea turtles and dolphins, CITES, and our use of vessel tracking systems and remote sensors.

As we look ahead, Mr. Chairman, we as a nation need to be in a position to continue in strengthening our international leadership role for the oceans. I recognize that the Commission has an enormous mandate covering a broad spectrum of issues and that the international considerations are but one facet of that mandate.

Let me again offer the services of the State Department for any assistance you need as you move from the information-gathering stage at this hearing and others to the deliberation and decision-making stage.

Let me conclude, on behalf of the President and Secretary Powell, with a special thanks to each of you for giving of your personal time and the effort you are dedicating to this most important endeavor.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.