

**Remarks for Governor Christine Todd Whitman,
Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,
at the
Inaugural Meeting of the
Commission on Ocean Policy
Washington, D.C.**

September 17, 2001

Let me begin by simply thanking you for being willing to serve on this critical commission. Your work over the next 18 months will be vitally important to the environmental health of the Earth's oceans, so I appreciate the time and sacrifice that your service requires.

Given the challenges we face, 18 months is not a long time to complete your work. I understand that you have been given a huge task and a short period of time, but I am confident that your efforts will provide important insight for our oceans policy.

Without further complicating your charge, I would like to share with you some of my thoughts about the important questions and issues I hope you will consider as part of your work.

In order to meet our obligation as stewards of the oceans, we need to be mindful of the environmental impact of everything we do on, in, and near the seas. I hope that in the overall context of ocean policy you will look specifically at the environmental health of our ocean waters as a necessary precursor to economic, recreational, and other uses. The impacts of ocean water quality are far reaching; after all, our oceans are not just valuable to those of us who live on land, they are also home to 80 percent of all the life forms found on earth.

There are a number of resources available to you as you consider these important issues. I encourage you to consult with a wide variety of non-governmental organizations that deal with environmental issues as they relate to our oceans. One that immediately comes to mind, partly because I served as its chair before I joined EPA, is the Pew Oceans Commission. Their experience could certainly be valuable as a complement to your expertise, so I hope that you find the chance to discuss this topic with them.

Of course, the EPA stands ready to assist your efforts as well. We expect water to be a major environmental issue in the 21st Century, largely on account of a new generation of challenges unlike those we have faced in the past. It is clear that the next level of environmental achievement in water will require the adoption of a watershed based approach. This approach underscores the fact that many actions that happen miles away from our ocean coasts can still impact the water quality of our coastal and ocean waters. This approach is based on partnerships with industry, nongovernmental groups, state and local governments, and residents of the coast. After all, those who live closest to a problem are often best at finding a solution.

When a suburban homeowner uses a certain pesticide on their lawn, or changes the oil in

their car in the driveway, rain can carry the residue far from where it was originally deposited. When farmers aren't careful about how they manage their animal waste and agricultural practices, a small creek can carry pollutants from the farm all the way to one of the Great Lakes or to the coast miles away. When city dwellers aren't careful about what is deposited on their streets, that waste can wind up in the ocean. This is what we call non-point source pollution – pollutants that aren't dumped directly into water but that wind up there anyway – and it is the primary cause of most of America's water pollution challenges today. Accordingly, we are increasing our efforts to address non-point sources.

Non-point source pollution, along with the growing coastal population, highlights the need for a watershed approach. This method has been used effectively to protect the Chesapeake Bay and in the National Estuary Program, and will be integral to our success in preserving all bodies of water – including the oceans – in the future.

To better protect the quality of our ocean waters, we need to use good science and to have better information about what's in them, and how much. This is true not just of coastal waters, but deep ocean water as well. We need to be able to better anticipate and present pollution and problems in the ocean. Under the Marine Protected Areas Executive Order (13158), the EPA has been directed to move forward to propose new science-based regulations to ensure the protection of the marine environment off our coasts for future generations. We will work closely with our partners at all levels of government as well as NGO's, industry, and other interested stakeholders to develop these new protections.

We must also include our neighbors around the world as partners, as the environmental challenges to our oceans do not recognize international borders. The resources of the oceans are shared by the entire planet, and are critical to atmospheric processes that help determine weather patterns that affect the flow of rivers, the depth of reservoirs and the productivity of agricultural land. Therefore, we must work as a global community to protect the seas for our children. The United States, and the EPA, have helped lead the way toward greater international cooperation on these issues – including work on the Land-Based Sources Protocol in the Caribbean Region, work on Annexes to the Convention on the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, and signing the Persistent Organic Pollutants Treaty in Stockholm earlier this year.

President Bush and I have said repeatedly that environmental protection and economic development can go hand in hand – and that is certainly true of our oceans. For example, the commercial fishing industry employs 250,000 people, ocean harvested food generates \$38 billion in economic activity, and approximately 85 percent of U.S. tourist revenue is collected by coastal states. Ensuring the survival of the ocean's fragile environment means protecting these integral elements of our economy at the same time. It is a balance that you will surely confront a number of times over the course of your work, and I hope that you will agree with us that by being responsible stewards of the ocean and coastal environment, we are also being good stewards of the enormous contributions it makes to our economy.

The issues facing our ocean policy are as diverse as the ecosystem it houses. I realize that environmental considerations are only one important piece of the complex puzzle you will be

evaluating over the next year and a half. As I have said, however, it is an incredibly important piece, so I look forward to working with you to protect and improve the health of our oceans for future generations.

Thank you.