

**Testimony Before the United States Commission
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By

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you of the needs for intellectual capital and understanding of the Gulf of Mexico - the most economically productive body of water within the jurisdiction of the United States. Offshore mineral leases producing 72 and 97% of the U.S. offshore oil and natural gas production, respectively, provide the second largest source of income for the United States Government; the tourist industry of the Gulf coast is a \$20 billion per year economic engine; four of the nations top ten ports handling more than 50% of the nation's waterborne commerce are in Gulf states with ships from scores of nations traversing the Gulf of Mexico daily; and, Gulf of Mexico fisheries, both recreational and commercial, have historically been a national leader in quantity and value. Coastal counties of the Gulf States are the fastest growing areas in the nation, a trend that is expected to continue for the foreseeable future; and, the Gulf of Mexico is growing in importance as a strategic location for the sea going U. S. military. It is also important to recognize that two-thirds of the continental United States watershed drains into the Gulf of Mexico. The value of the Gulf of Mexico and its impact on the Nation's quality of life is especially remarkable considering that the United States has territorial claim to only the northern half of the Gulf of Mexico. We share management responsibility of this infinitely valuable resource with Mexico just as we share the bounty of the Gulf of Mexico with the world. The key message I wish to impart today is that effective management requires a wealth of intellectual resources with intimate understanding of the dynamics of the Gulf of Mexico who are in constant touch with Gulf habitats and resources from its shorelines to its abyssal depths.

Today, the challenge before us is to ensure that the value of the Gulf of Mexico as a natural resource, an economic engine, a cultural heritage, and a great playground is never diminished. We are the stewards of this magnificent body of water that in truth belongs to societies of the future. Consequently, we must extract value from the Gulf of Mexico no more or less than our needs warrant, and do so in a manner that does not diminish its dynamics or productivity. You have heard testimony from Dr. Madilyn Fletcher, President of the National Association of Marine Laboratories. Dr. Fletcher described the efforts of marine research laboratories to work collectively to foster understanding and management of the Gulf of Mexico. Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has launched itself on a path to be a major contributor to these efforts.

It is not an over statement to say that the need for advanced understanding and management of the Gulf's living resources is at a crisis stage. For example, in July 2001, sixteen leading marine scientists from around the world published a paper in the journal *Science* stating that historically, "*Ecological extinction caused by overfishing precedes all other pervasive human disturbance to coastal ecosystems, including pollution, degradation of water quality, and anthropogenic climate change.*" Management of a living wild marine resource is one of the most difficult challenges to science. And, we are not always successful as the history of declining Gulf fisheries demonstrate.

Why is our record of marine resource management less than stellar? There are many reasons, including inadequate funding, competition for funding rather than collaboration between scientists and institutions, and political and legal challenges to the research and management efforts. Yes, I will state the obvious and say that funding for marine science is inadequate; but I will also state that the funding that does exist is sometimes used with less effectiveness due to the competitive nature of the business of science. We also experience changes in funding and scientific focus, literally overnight, with an election and change in national, state, and local leadership. And far too often, politically and legally, "good science" is, in application, defined as science that says what I want to hear. Science that is contradictory, is obviously bad science.

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has a long history of education, research and public service relative to maintaining sustainable living resources in the Gulf of Mexico. We are now in the process of significantly expanding our efforts in areas of education, research and public service related to understanding and managing the living resources of the Gulf of Mexico. The newly founded Harte Research Institute for Gulf of México Studies, the Center for Coastal Studies, and the Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science are all concentrating on expanding our knowledge of the Gulf of Mexico and its living resources.

Founded on the generosity of a private citizen, Mr. Ed Harte and his family, the Harte Research Institute is a \$46 million endowed institute being created to help build and marshal the intellectual capital of the Gulf of Mexico into a unified team with a common goal - advancing understanding, management, and conservation of the Gulf of Mexico. Through educational programs we will build intellectual capital. Through research programs we will expand knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of the Gulf of Mexico. And, through involvement we will help guide wise management philosophies through the political and legal minefields.

The laws governing the dynamics of nature are dictated by the order of nature, not by human hands. Those of us addressing the challenges of resource management daily are dependent upon government, industry, and the private citizen to help us successfully complete those tasks to serve local, regional, and global societies, current and future. I respectfully ask that you take this message back to "The Hill" and develop the necessary strategies to keep science and resource management on pace with escalating population growth, demands and pressures we exert on our natural resources.

Thank you.