UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20230

March 27, 2001

The Honorable James V. Hansen
Chairman, Committee on Resources
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6201

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter provides you with the views of the Department of Commerce on H.R. 642, a bill to re-authorize the Chesapeake Bay Office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Department strongly supports this legislation which furthers efforts to protect, restore and maintain living marine resources and their habitats in the Chesapeake Bay area by utilizing NOAA's diverse capabilities and expertise.

Estuaries such as the Chesapeake Bay are an important part of our nation's economic and environmental well-being and are an integral part of the Department's mission and goals. As one of the largest estuaries in the world, the Chesapeake Bay provides habitat for many important species and supports the economic and traditional values of many communities in the Bay area. The bill will highlight and coordinate NOAA's many estuarine-related fisheries, habitat, and atmospheric activities in the Chesapeake Bay region and serve as a national model for regional coordination activities.

We are pleased to see the bill emphasize small, on-the-ground restoration projects that benefit local fish and shellfish habitats, fish passage, wetlands and sea grass beds. These projects will build stronger community relationships around the Bay. The Department also is pleased that the bill recognizes the Department's expertise in fisheries management and its ability to provide leadership in the emerging area of multi-species or ecosystem-based fisheries management.

As previously stated, we strongly support H.R. 642 and the continued opportunities provided by the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office to partner with other Federal and state agencies, as well as to showcase NOAA's expertise and innovation. However, the Department recommends the enclosed additions and changes to strengthen and clarify the intent of the legislation.

The Department looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure that the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office continues to focus efforts in support of the recovery and sustainable use of the largest and most productive estuary in the United States.

The Office of Management and Budget has advised the Department that there is no objection to the submission of this letter to the Congress from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely,

Donald D. Trigg
Director of the Office of Policy
and Strategic Planning

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Nick J. Rahall, II
The Honorable Wayne T. Gilchrest
The Honorable Robert A. Underwood

Recommended Changes to H.R. 642
Reauthorization of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office (NCBO)

1. **Section 1(a)**
"Subsection 307(b)(3)"

This section should be amended to delete the word "coordinate", and insert the words "facilitate the coordination of" .

In addition, the words "and facilities" should be inserted before the word "within" in the same section.

Delete the word "and" before the words "the Chesapeake Bay units of the National Estuarine Research Reserve."

Insert the words "and the Cooperative Oxford Lab" after the word "System," and before the word "including."

Justification: The first amendment clarifies that the NCBO works *with* the other NOAA programs to ensure that agency activities in the Chesapeake Bay are coordinated, but clarifies that NCBO does not have primary authority over the operation of these programs. The second amendment emphasizes the importance of ensuring a strong role for regional NOAA facilities. The third amendment highlights the relationship between the two Chesapeake Bay-sited facilities: the NCBO and the Cooperative Oxford Lab.

2. **Section 1(a)**
"Subsection 307(b)(3)(A and B)"

Delete subsection (B): "programs and activities of the Cooperative Oxford Laboratory of the National Ocean Service with respect to–". Renumber items (B) (i)-(iv) and add them cumulatively to items (i)-(vii) under subsection (A) as items (viii)-(xi). To the renumbered items (ix) and (x), insert "and estuarine" after the word "marine."

Justification: There are multiple NOAA line offices and programs currently participating in each of the eleven items listed under sections (3)(A) and (B) and it may be inappropriate to identify specific activities solely with individual line offices. The inclusion of the words "and estuarine" clarifies that NOAA works in estuarine as well as marine environments.

2. **Section 1(a)**
"Subsection 307(d)"

Delete this subsection.

Justification: We are currently in negotiations with Appropriations Committee staff to consolidate many of the individual line items contained in NOAA's budget into a more manageable budget structure.

4. Section 1(c)(2)(A)

Replace "estuaries" with "estuary."

Justification: To make clear the Chesapeake Bay is understood to be one estuary.