

June 5, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500 Dear President Obama:

Dear President Obama:

Our oceans and marine resources are sources of great economic and environmental wealth and are held in public trust for the nation. Our 3.4 million square mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the largest in the world, covers an area greater than the entire terrestrial United States. Our nation's extensive ocean and coastal resources provide many services and benefits, including supporting maritime commerce, fisheries and energy development essential to our economy, and environmental protection, tourism, and recreation vital to our quality of life. Balancing use and protection of marine resources for current and future generations requires strong science-based management of our oceans and coasts. Interagency coordination and federal-state-local partnerships are central to improving the management of these resources.

I am writing to support the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) lead role in developing a comprehensive federal marine spatial planning framework to guide decisions on ocean use and conservation. To create a science-based forum for interagency discussions on such a framework, I urge the Administration to use the convening authorities of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, under the National Science and Technology Council, and the Council on Environmental Quality. Through this mechanism, the Administration could bring the best federal science and technology to inform and strengthen ocean and coastal planning and management across the federal government.

In April 2009, the Department of the Interior issued a rule on offshore renewable energy development. The rule directed the Minerals Management Agency (MMS) to develop renewable energy on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) in coordination with interagency planning activities which are designed to avoid conflicts among users and maximize the economic and ecological benefits of our OCS. One of the activities mentioned in the rule is a multifaceted spatial planning effort that will incorporate ecosystem based science and stewardship along with socioeconomics, research, and

modeling. The rule stated that the Council on Environmental Quality will help coordinate this interagency effort with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) playing a key role along with MMS.

The Committee strongly supports the Administration's interest in science-based planning to inform management decisions in the ocean; however, I believe the focus on renewable energy resources is limiting. To support effective planning and coordination for the myriad of uses occurring in our oceans, including OCS decisions coordinated pursuant to the April rule, I urge the Administration to create a broad science-based effort that can form the basis for a comprehensive evaluation of marine ecosystems and their functions and that recognizes the variety of uses occurring in our oceans.

The Commerce Committee has a longstanding interest in comprehensive ocean planning and has developed legislation that balances environment protection and human uses, from habitat protection and national marine sanctuaries to commercial fishing, offshore thermal energy conversion, and maritime shipping lanes. The Committee is charged with the comprehensive study and review of all matters relating to science and technology, oceans policy, and transportation, and has exercised this interest through its oversight of: NOAA, the nation's premier ocean science and resource agency; the United States Coast Guard, charged with safeguarding our maritime safety, security, and environment; and, other federal agencies whose activities fall within our jurisdiction, including the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the National Science Foundation.

The Committee works to make sure that strong science and technology advice support policy decisions affecting our oceans, atmosphere, and ecosystems. NOAA is the federal agency principally responsible for managing our coastal and marine resources to meet the Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs. NOAA is the agency best suited to convene and lead an effort to design a system that safeguards the long-term health of our ocean ecosystems and economies. NOAA is the trustee of the health of living marine resources and habitats, and it is responsible for key state-federal partnerships for the coastal zone, charged with balancing resource protection and community benefits. Therefore, NOAA is uniquely qualified to shape the U.S. approach to multiuse planning for the OCS, given their expertise and experience in the areas of resource conservation, marine ecosystem science, ocean and coastal mapping and observing, oceans and human health, and sustainable coastal communities.

I also acknowledge that this must be an interagency process that builds on the strong contributions and technical expertise of other federal agencies. Given the need for an interagency, science-based approach, I would urge the Administration to utilize the convening authorities of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, under the National Science and Technology Council, to make certain that the best science and technology is harnessed from federal agencies to inform this important matter. Such an

approach, strongly supported by the White House and Office of Management and Budget, was used in 1990 to spur a large scale effort to study global climate change. The Nation's oceans deserve no less.

Sincerely,

John D. Rockefeller, IV
Chairman

Carbon copy: The Honorable Dr. Peter Orszag, Director, Office of Budget and Management
The Honorable Dr. John Holdren, Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy
The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality