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7 May 2007

Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr.
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Kameran Onley
Assistant Deputy Secretary
Office of the Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

re: recommendations by Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

Dear Under Secretary Lautenbacher and Assistant Deputy Secretary Onley:

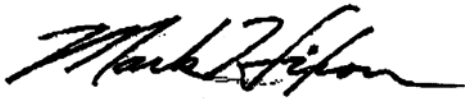
On behalf of the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC), I am pleased to submit for your consideration the attached recommendations regarding the *Framework for Developing a National System of Marine Protected Areas*, currently under revision by your Departments. These recommendations were developed by the MPA FAC in response to the Committee's ad hoc charge from the Departments of Commerce and the Interior delivered at our April 2007 meeting in Arlington, VA.

The attached recommendations were adopted via six separate votes, five of which were unanimous and one of which passed by overwhelming majority. I believe that these results indicate the unique value of this 30-member FAC in its consistent ability to seek and find consensus based on extensive discussion that is both forthright and respectful.

The Committee was gratified that our collective comments on the draft *Framework for Developing a National System of MPAs* were well-received and that the National Marine Protected Areas Center is committed to developing a final Framework that incorporates the constructive comments of all stakeholder groups. During our recent meeting, I was particularly impressed by the excellent partnership that has developed among members of the MPA FAC, our ex officio members, and the staff of the National MPA Center.

The MPA FAC looks forward to your response, and to continuing our work with the Departments of Commerce and the Interior to help develop a National System of MPAs that serves both present and future generations of Americans. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Hixon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark Hixon
Helen Thompson Professor of Marine Conservation Biology and
Chair, Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee

attachment

cc: Lauren Wenzel, Designated Federal Official, National Marine Protected Areas Center, NOAA

**Recommendations of the
Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee:
Management Criteria, Priority Objectives, and Categories for
The National System of Marine Protected Areas**

April 2007

Context

To assist the National Marine Protected Areas Center in preparing the final *Framework for Developing a National System of Marine Protected Areas*, the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee (MPA FAC) was asked to prepare three sets of recommendations:

1. **Management Criteria:** A set of management criteria that could serve as entry criteria for the National System and/or evaluative criteria for determining necessary management improvements to sites that are admitted to the System.
2. **Priority Objectives:** A prioritized list of specific National System conservation objectives, under which existing and new areas would be identified over time, for each of the following MPA purposes: natural heritage, cultural heritage, and sustainable production.
3. **MPA Categories:** A set of user-friendly MPA categories within the National System based on site purpose and type of protection, which would serve to communicate the contribution of sites to the System and to facilitate identification of gaps in the System.

The following recommendations are offered for consideration as the Departments of Commerce and the Interior finalize the *Framework for Developing a National System of Marine Protected Areas*. The final Framework will contain definitions and criteria for MPAs to enter the National System. To encourage transparency and public engagement in developing the National System, the MPA FAC also adopted the following motion:

“The FAC recommends that Department of Commerce, in consultation with the Department of the Interior, publish a compilation of sites that meet (1) the definition of an MPA (including key terms) and (2) the criteria for entry into a national system of MPAs. This compilation should be published in conjunction with the publication of the *Framework for the National System of Marine Protected Areas*.”

(1) *Management Criteria*

The MPA FAC recommends that the National System of MPAs:

- addresses the three purposes of the National System (natural heritage, cultural heritage, sustainable production);
- is geographically representative;
- is ecologically representative, including multiple sites to ensure continued representation in the face of harmful impacts;
- represents all levels of governance (federal, state, tribal, local, community);
- demonstrates adaptive management; and
- fosters cooperation and coordination among managing agencies and sites, including overlapping and adjacent sites.

These characteristics would be achieved initially by the following three entry criteria:

- (1) the site meets the federal definition of Marine Protected Area;
- (2) the site meets at least one of the following two criteria:
 - a site-specific management plan, and/or
 - a formal community-based management agreement, whether written or oral; and
- (3) the site is formally nominated by the governing body or bodies responsible for that site.

Additional sites could be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to address gaps in the National System relative to the six recommended characteristics described above. These could include sites that are part of broader programmatic management plans.

All sites in the National System will work toward improved management by including the following, implemented in a manner to support each site's goals and objectives:

- monitoring and assessment;
- compliance and enforcement;
- balanced stakeholder involvement throughout the process;
- active outreach and education; and
- staff on site or dedicated to the site.

(2) Priority Objectives

The MPA FAC was asked to evaluate the following factors when developing, ranking, and grouping conservation objectives:

- **Importance** of the objective, based on the MPA FAC's best judgment (objectives of greater urgency or significance would rank higher than those of lower importance);
- **Availability of existing scientific or other data** necessary to achieve the objective (having readily available data that allow for timely progress would rank higher than requiring additional studies or research); and
- **Effort necessary to achieve the objective** with respect to often limited and fluctuating staffing and funds (ability to complete an objective – nominate existing sites and identify gaps – within 1-3 years is more desirable than longer timeframes).

In discussing these considerations in ad hoc subcommittees, there was often no clear consensus regarding priorities. Many members of the MPA FAC believed that all the identified priority objectives were important. In plenary deliberations, the full Committee decided to adopt "phases" recommended by ad hoc subcommittees, but not to adopt the rankings as part of the Committee's recommendations, even though rankings were used to justify the phases. Ranking of each list was accomplished by each member of an ad hoc subcommittee ranking the priority objectives, then averaging those rankings among members. In all three of the following tables (next page), "**Phase**" refers to the timing and practicality of implementing the listed conservation objectives, phase 1 including objectives that the MPA FAC believes could be implemented first from the perspective of both timing and practicality.

Natural Heritage Objectives:	Phase
Critical habitat of threatened and endangered species	1
Reproduction areas and nursery grounds	1
Biogenic habitat	1
Key areas for migratory species	2
Areas of high species and/or habitat diversity	2
Unique or rare habitats and associated communities	2
Link areas important to life histories (e.g., spawning areas and nursery habitats)	3
Ecologically important geologic features, as well as enduring and recurring oceanographic features	3
Areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research	3

Cultural Heritage Objectives:	Phase
Cultural and Historic Resources Listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)	1
Cultural and Historic Resources determined eligible for the NRHP or listed on a State Register	1
Cultural sites that are paramount to a culture's identity and/or survival	1
Cultural and Historic sites that may be threatened	2
Cultural and Historic Sites that can be utilized for heritage tourism	2
Cultural and Historic sites that are under-represented	3

Sustainable Production Objectives:	Phase
Reproduction areas (including areas of high larval production) and nursery grounds	1
Areas important for the conservation of natural age and sex structure of important harvestable species	1
Foraging grounds	2
Reduce bycatch in areas where bycatch has a substantial impact on sustainable fisheries	2
Areas that provide compatible opportunities for education and research	3
Areas that conserve or restore high priority fishing grounds	3

(3) *MPA Categories*

A set of MPA categories for use within the National System would help to address concerns regarding the size and scope of the System that have been raised by the MPA FAC and other stakeholders. Such categorization would be beneficial in multiple ways:

- Provides a limited set of user friendly terms for communicating about each National System MPA's purpose and level of protection;
- Partitions the National System into manageably-sized groups of comparable sites to ease identification of shared technical or other assistance;
- Packages sites based on comparable conservation objectives to facilitate identification of gaps in protection; and
- Provides a logical framework for organizing and tracking how sites added to the National System contribute to the System's conservation objectives.

The following page lists the MPA FAC's recommendations regarding this charge.

	MPA Category	Primary Management Goals	Use and Protection
Marine Natural Heritage* Areas	Natural Resource Conservation Areas	Conserve or restore significant marine natural resources (and where appropriate, cultural marine resources), habitats, and processes; and the ecosystem values, services, and uses they provide to present and future generations.	Multiple uses allowed; however, uses and activities may be restricted or zoned, and access limited as necessary to meet site management goals.
	Natural Resource Reserve Areas**	Strongly protect significant marine natural resources (and where appropriate, cultural marine resources), habitats, and processes; and the ecosystem values, services, and uses they provide to present and future generations.	No extractive uses allowed, except permitted scientific uses; destructive or disruptive activities limited; other uses and activities may be restricted or zoned, and access limited, as necessary to meet site management goals.
Marine Sustainable Production* Areas	Sustainable Production Conservation Areas	Achieve the sustainable harvest and/or restoration of marine species and the social, cultural, and economic values and services they provide to present and future generations.	Multiple uses allowed; however, uses and activities may be restricted or zoned, and access limited as necessary to meet site management goals.
	Sustainable Production Reserve Areas**	Strongly protect important biological, geological, or ecosystem features needed to achieve the sustainable harvest and/or restoration of marine species and the social, cultural, and economic values and services they provide to present and future generations.	No extractive uses allowed, except permitted scientific uses; destructive or disruptive activities limited; other uses and activities may be restricted or zoned, and access limited, as necessary to meet site management goals.
Marine Cultural Heritage* Areas	Cultural Resource Conservation Areas	Conserve marine cultural resources (and where appropriate, associated biological resources), and provide compatible spiritual, traditional, scientific, educational, and recreational opportunities and uses.	Multiple uses allowed; however, uses and activities may be restricted or zoned, and access limited as necessary to meet site management goals.
	Cultural Resource Reserve Areas**	Strongly protect cultural resources (and where appropriate, associated biological resources); and provide compatible spiritual, traditional, scientific, educational, and recreational opportunities and uses.	No extractive uses allowed, except permitted scientific uses; destructive or disruptive activities limited; other uses and activities may be restricted or zoned, and access limited, as necessary to meet site management goals.

* These terms refer to the primary management goal of the MPA, acknowledging that a particular site could address more than one management goal.

** Additional clarification will be needed as to whether areas grouped into these "reserve" categories are zones within a larger area or are free-standing.