

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 13, 2009

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke and Under Secretary Lubchenco:

We continue to have serious concerns about NOAA's proposed move of its Marine Operations Center-Pacific from its decades-long home in the Puget Sound to a new location in Newport, Oregon. In particular, we are extremely concerned about possible negative consequences and costs such a move will have on NOAA's ability to carry out its scientific missions.

NOAA's proposed move threatens the collaboration that helps NOAA researchers need to advance the agency's scientific mission. Indeed, NOAA recognized the importance of proximity to other NOAA facilities by including "Proximity to the NOAA Western Regional Center" on Sand Point Way as a key factor in the Solicitation for Offer. Only ports in the Puget Sound provide this proximity to the Regional Center as well as proximity to a large number of other NOAA facilities. For example:

- NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR) has one of its nine nationwide major facilities located in the Puget Sound, the Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory, while Oregon has no major OAR facilities.
- NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS) has five facilities located throughout the Puget Sound, including the NOAA Hazardous Materials Response Division. Meanwhile, Oregon has no major NOS facilities.
- NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has five major facilities throughout Washington State, several of which serve as the agency's major regional hubs for fisheries science research: the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Northwest Fisheries Science Center, NMFS Northwest Regional Office, Pasco Research Station, and Mukilteo Research Station. Oregon only houses the Newport Research Station and Laboratory and the Point Adams Research Station in Hammond, Oregon.

NOAA researchers from these facilities are the intended users and beneficiaries of the vessels that will be homeported at the MOC-P, and relocating the ships to Newport would dramatically diminish the ease and ability of NOAA's scientists to access their own research vessels. In

contrast, the Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport, Oregon is located over 300 miles from NOAA's major research facilities listed above, and the Hatfield Science Center is not a NOAA facility but is a marine laboratory for Oregon State University.

Transporting NOAA researchers from their facilities in the Puget Sound to their vessels in Newport is both expensive and inconvenient. Newport, Oregon is a roughly a 300-mile drive from Seattle, a 150-mile drive from the nearest major airport in Portland, and Newport's local airport is serviced by only one small, regional airline. NOAA's scientists should be focusing their time, energy, and creativity on collaborating to achieve groundbreaking science, not on figuring out how to cope with extra logistical hurdles of how to travel hundreds of miles to access a research vessel.

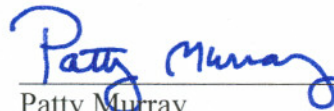
This distance is particularly problematic for outside scientists wishing to collaborate with NOAA scientists and conduct research on NOAA's research vessels. In an age where collaboration is such a key factor in creating good science, it seems ironic that NOAA would add such hurdles discouraging collaboration, rather than making collaboration as logistically easy as possible.

We believe NOAA did not sufficiently consider the costs of moving its research vessels hundreds of miles away from the very researchers and scientists who will utilize those vessels the most. We request that you take a fresh look at these vital questions and conduct a formal independent review of these logistical hurdles' implications in the context of whether moving NOAA's Marine Operations Center-Pacific to Newport, Oregon is truly a wise decision for NOAA, its employees, and its scientific missions.

Respectfully,



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator
Chair, Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere,
Fisheries and Coast Guard



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Jim McDermott
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee
Member of Congress



Brian Baird
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Dave Reichert
Member of Congress