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**NOAA Takes Steps to Assure Fair and Effective Enforcement, Protect Resources**  
*Move comes in response to Inspector General Review*

NOAA administrator Jane Lubchenco today outlined specific steps the agency has taken and will take to assure that NOAA has an effective and fair enforcement program to protect fisheries and other marine resources that sustain the jobs and economic vibrancy of America's coastal communities, in response to a January review of the Commerce Department Inspector General.

The review of NOAA's law enforcement program was requested by Dr. Lubchenco soon after she was named to head NOAA in 2009.

"We said in February we would take action, and that's exactly what we've done," said Dr. Lubchenco. "The steps we've taken, along with those we'll implement as we move forward, will go a long way toward protecting our nation's marine resources through the enforcement of fair, well understood, and effective regulations."

NOAA's law enforcement program is made up of more than 200 agents and attorneys responsible for ensuring compliance with more than 35 statutes designed to conserve and protect our nation's marine resources and their habitat. The program has jurisdiction over three million square miles of open ocean, more than 85,000 miles of U.S. coastline, the nation's 13 national marine sanctuaries, and its marine national monuments. Fair and effective enforcement to protect fish stocks, marine mammals and the marine environment is essential to strong coastal communities with sustainable economies.

The report details several actions already taken by NOAA, including:

- Transferring oversight of the Asset Forfeiture Fund, which holds fines imposed by NOAA, from NOAA's Fisheries Service to the NOAA comptroller.
- Freezing the hiring of criminal investigators until a work force analysis is completed and approved by Dr. Lubchenco that will address the appropriate mix of criminal investigators and civil enforcement officers.
- Requiring high-level review of all proposed charges for alleged violations and of all settlements by the general counsel.
- Filing a rule today to place the burden of justifying a particular civil penalty or permit sanction on NOAA rather than the respondent in cases before administrative law judges.

The report also outlines a number of specific actions that the agency intends to take, including:

- Developing a new penalty policy, including a revision of the penalty and permit sanction schedules.

- Reviewing and revising NOAA law enforcement and general counsel operations manuals.
- Developing a communications plan to provide greater outreach to fishermen and fishing communities, and other fisheries stakeholders.

“Under my leadership, I am confident these measures will produce a more effective enforcement system to protect our nation’s marine resources for all of us who rely on the many benefits of a healthy marine environment,” said Dr. Lubchenco. “I encourage commercial and recreational fishermen and others who rely on healthy marine resources to work with us to achieve this goal.”

Dr. Lubchenco’s report to the Inspector General is available online at [http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/PDFs/Response\\_IGReport.pdf](http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/PDFs/Response_IGReport.pdf). The report’s appendices are available online at [http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/PDFs/IGReport\\_Appendices1-15.pdf](http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/PDFs/IGReport_Appendices1-15.pdf).

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