

Sea Grant Association

Mr. Raymond Ban
Chairman
Science Advisory Board
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Room 11230
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Attn: Dr. Cynthia Decker, Executive Director, NOAA SAB

Dear Chairman Ban:

The Sea Grant Association (SGA) is pleased to submit its comments on the draft report entitled, *In the Nation's Best Interest: Making the Most of NOAA's Science Enterprise*.

The Sea Grant Association (SGA) is a non-profit organization consisting of the academic institutions that participate in the National Sea Grant College Program. SGA provides the mechanism for these institutions to coordinate their activities; to set program priorities at both the regional and national level; undertake strategic planning and evaluation; and to provide a unified voice for these institutions on issues of importance to the oceans and coasts.

We understand this review of NOAA's Research and Development (R&D) portfolio is part of the agency's efforts to ensure its investment in R&D contributes to the economic, employment, national security, nutritional, life and property benefits to the nation. The R&D Portfolio Review Task Force (PRTF) that developed this report was directed to examine how the current state of research at NOAA supports the goals in the agency's Next Generation Strategic Plan. The PRTF was also charged with recommending management changes where necessary to ensure alignment with those goals.

The draft report makes a number of important recommendations. Of particular note are the recommendations calling for increased emphasis on supporting socioeconomic and integrated ecosystem sciences. The report also suggests that NOAA forge new partnerships of researchers and end-users at the outset of a project and continue these partnerships until the project is complete to enhance the transition of research to operations. This applies to partnerships among NOAA and university researchers through NOAA extramural programs. The PRTF also recommends, as have previous NOAA R&D reviews, that NOAA should increase its support for extramural research.

The SGA strongly supports these recommendations. Increased extramural research could allow NOAA to leverage its R&D investment with the resources of the nation's leading university scientists. It could obtain greater and faster scientific advances at lower costs, particularly in areas of new research. This would also provide NOAA with greater flexibility, as permanent

staff need not always be hired to conduct the research. To some extent, increasing NOAA's investment in extramural research can also compensate for the changes occurring in NOAA's workforce. The report goes on to state that the balance between extramural and internal research will vary between NOAA activities, but a predictable and reliable partnership with the extramural research community is critical to NOAA's long-term success.

The SGA views the R&D Portfolio Review as an opportunity to build on the existing relationship between NOAA and the National Sea Grant College Program. A number of the programmatic recommendations included in the draft report can and should be implemented in a timely fashion by using the existing network that exists within the Sea Grant program. This option should be thoroughly considered prior to creating any new office or programmatic infrastructure. Sea Grant stands ready to support NOAA's strategic priorities by making use of its networks and long standing relationships with local, state and regional coastal decision makers and the university research community. Sea Grant's 33 state-based programs already support and help NOAA accomplish its national strategic goals through its engagement with officials at the local and state level by working with over 300 academic institutions annually to support ocean and coastal research, extension, outreach, education and training. Sea Grant's current method of applying scientific research discovery in coastal areas in order to solve the socioeconomic and ecological challenges facing those communities is the type of value-added extramural program that NOAA can leverage to help meet its new focus.

As NOAA seeks to develop a strong capacity in the socioeconomic and integrated ecosystem sciences, Sea Grant campuses and networks are ready to provide a proven framework for achieving success through our existing community relationships and integrated programs. For example, over the past two years Sea Grant has increased its support for social science research projects by about 50%. The National Sea Grant Office has also begun reaching out to social scientists within and outside of Sea Grant to establish a working group that will: seek ways to facilitate increased interactions among Sea Grant, academic and NOAA social scientists; compile potential reviewers for research programs and proposals; and support adoption of social science discoveries. Sea Grant can be the nexus for NOAA to more effectively bring its national science R&D advances to local coastal communities and businesses through integrated extension, outreach, education and training programs. NOAA can also take advantage of existing Sea Grant platforms and capabilities to perform essential ecosystem monitoring and make additional observations critical to all coastal ecosystems.

The SAB Report calls for increased NOAA support of extramural programs. In an era of tightening budgets, Sea Grant can leverage the impact of NOAA's investments through the non-federal cost sharing that is attached to the Sea Grant program. This cost sharing feature of the Sea Grant program facilitates the institutionalization of R&D integration into coastal economic decision making.

By taking advantage of the existing Sea Grant network, NOAA can meet the Task Force's recommendation of ensuring predictable and reliable extramural partnerships while also enhancing NOAA's access to world-class academic research; unique research facilities; and the proven Sea Grant process for developing the next generation of a scientific and technologically competent workforce. This expanded partnership also secures Sea Grant's research mission by

providing stability and new funding resources. In addition, by taking advantage of the existing Sea Grant infrastructure and personnel, NOAA will be streamlining its cost centers, providing a greater return on its federal investment.

In closing, we reiterate the Sea Grant Association's strong support for the recommendations put forth by the PRTF and for Sea Grant's capacity to support NOAA in achieving its goals. We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and would be happy to provide additional information upon request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "LaDon Swann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "LaDon" and the last name "Swann" clearly legible.

LaDon Swann
President
Sea Grant Association

cc: Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Administrator, NOAA
Dr. Robert Detrick, Associate Administrator, OAR
Dr. Leon Cammen, Director, National Sea Grant College Program
Dr. Nancy Rabalais, Chair, National Sea Grant Advisory Board
Delegates, Sea Grant Association