

Sea Grant Association

October 20, 2006

Dr. Margaret Leinen, National Science Foundation
Dr. Richard Spinrad, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Dr. Dan Walker, Office of Science and Technology Policy
Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology
Office of Science and Technology Policy
Executive Office of the President
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Drs. Leinen, Spinrad, and Walker:

On behalf of the Sea Grant Association (SGA), I am pleased to submit our comments on the report entitled, “*Charting the Course for Ocean Science in the United States: Research Priorities for the Next Decade.*”

The SGA applauds the efforts of the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST) to identify the most pressing research needs related to the ocean sciences. The research priorities set forth in this draft document are far-reaching and focus appropriately on some of the nation’s most important short and long term research requirements. The current draft addresses many of the recommendations made by the community at the Denver workshop in April and elsewhere. We are encouraged by the level of attention given to ocean, coastal and Great Lakes issues via this plan and look forward to an opportunity to support and assist in the implementation of the plan’s recommendations.

As you know, the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) is the premier university-based research, outreach and education program at NOAA in support of coastal resource use and conservation. The thirty-one Sea Grant Programs are located in every coastal, Great Lakes, and Gulf Coast state and work to address the urgent and immediate needs of coastal managers through “place-based” science. It is the goal of the NSGCP to strengthen decision-making by providing credible science-based information, and in accomplishing this acts as a link between government, scientists, academia, industry, and the American public. The Sea Grant Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering the Sea Grant Program concept and its membership includes the academic institutions that participate in the NSGCP.

Integrated research, outreach, and education make up the basis of the Sea Grant concept. Likewise, the draft plan seeks to utilize these same concepts to accomplish the goals set forth in the twenty-one identified priorities. Everyday, Sea Grant supported research is fostering healthy marine ecosystems, seafood safety, sustainable living marine resources, economically viable and safe coastal communities, new technologies for ocean development, coastal observatories, and education and human resources development. In addition, its education and outreach activities,

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For more information, please visit www.sga.seagrant.org or contact:

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via its teams of extension agents, educators, and communicators, put research results to use by providing local leaders and the public with the information needed to make wise management decisions. As a result, Sea Grant is uniquely positioned to play an integral role in helping the nation address many of the priorities identified in the draft plan. Below are three examples of how Sea Grant can contribute to the implementation of the priorities in the draft plan.

First, Sea Grant supports research that addresses the needs of coastal communities, especially urban coasts. The coasts are attractive areas for business, recreation, and residential development. We are encouraged that the draft plan highlights the need for research to understand more fully the interface between human activity and the ocean. An ecosystem-based approach to management cannot be successful without incorporating humans into the definition of ocean ecosystem and vice versa. In addition, the urbanization of America's coasts and watersheds threatens these vital resources with pollution and other problems, such as harmful algal blooms (HABs), hypoxia/anoxia and aquatic invasive species. Sea Grant provides the research, education and outreach structure needed to foster a safer, well-informed, and aware populace able to make better choices in responding to these and other pressing challenges.

Secondly, Sea Grant plays a very active role in enhancing community resilience to natural disasters. Building strong and safe coastal communities involves developing sustainable linkages to stakeholders at many levels and providing them with the basic knowledge and understanding of the relationship between their lives and their coastal environment. Building community capacity to recognize problems, improve local planning and management practices, and devise sustainable solutions is central to the mission of Sea Grant Programs nationwide. The 2005 hurricane season underscored the need for greatly improved information transfer to enable and empower communities to better prepare, respond and rebuild. Sea Grant research and related efforts help to enhance preparedness and reduce loss of life, property, and natural resources at the hand of naturally-occurring coastal hazards. The draft JSOST plan addresses the need for thorough hazard assessment, translation of research into results, and enhanced communication and education. Sea Grant, with its experience in hazard planning, mitigation and restoration can play a vital role in implementing this aspect of the Subcommittee's draft plan.

Finally, the section of the draft report entitled, "Opportunities for Progress – Making a Difference," which discusses "Information to Support Decision-Making," is a textbook example of how many of the report's priorities dovetail with the strengths of the Sea Grant Program. The individual Sea Grant Programs tailor their activities to the specific research needs of the coastal communities, state or region in which they operate. This continually provides local resource managers, national, regional and local governments, and citizens on-the-ground support and expertise on a regular basis and especially in times of need. Communication and collaboration among Sea Grant Programs facilitates coordination across these scales. With its science-based focus, Sea Grant is usually viewed as an honest broker among a wide range of constituencies – including state and local government, academia, business, industry, and private citizens. As the JSOST considers how best to translate research into action, Sea Grant is prepared to use its considerable experience and expertise to assist in this effort.

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SGA is largely supportive of the current draft. There are, however, two issues we believe could use more explicit attention. Enhanced ocean education and literacy for students at all levels (K-gray) is needed to ensure that the citizenry is aware of their impacts on the sea as well as the sea's impacts on them, to better understand the potential dangers as well as benefits derived from the sea, and to help local managers make wise decisions regarding the use of the oceans and its resources. Ocean literacy and education has implications for national security, economic development, and quality of life. As such, we believe it should be more prominently highlighted in the final JSOST report. Second, while we appreciate that this document is not an implementation plan, it is important to recognize that extant programs (like Sea Grant) represent a strong capacity that can be put to use in short order to address the critical issues and opportunities raised in the report. Building upon this national capacity in new and innovative ways can only strengthen our ability to make progress in the near term.

On behalf of the Sea Grant Association, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide these views. As the JSOST moves forward with its planning and implementation of these priorities, we hope you will call on the National Sea Grant College Program as a resource and partner. If the SGA can provide you with additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (301) 405-7500 or Kramer@mdsg.umd.edu.

Sincerely,



Jonathan G. Kramer
President, Sea Grant Association
Director, Maryland Sea Grant College Program