

Sea Grant Association

March 1, 2007

Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and
NOAA Administrator
Herbert C. Hoover Building
14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear VADM Lautenbacher:

As you know, the President signed the FY 2007 Year-Long Joint Funding Resolution (H.J. Res. 20) into law, thereby providing appropriations to NOAA for the remainder of the fiscal year. Under this legislation, NOAA has considerable flexibility with regard to the allocations that can be made to NOAA line offices and programs. In our opinion this joint resolution gives NOAA some ability to reverse the adverse impacts starting to accrue in the National Sea Grant College Program generated by the significant reductions taken in FY 2006. On behalf of the Sea Grant Association (SGA), I hope you will acknowledge the importance of NOAA's extramural research activities, and the National Sea Grant College Program in particular, as you make decisions regarding NOAA's FY 2007 spending plan. Specifically, I ask that you seriously consider providing some funding relief to this nationally recognized program to partially offset the impending impacts we identify below as you prepare the NOAA spending plan for FY 2007.

The NOAA National Sea Grant College Program has served the nation for four decades, supporting important research, education and extension services, and providing a wealth of expertise and experience on a broad range of issues -- from fostering healthy marine ecosystems, to seafood safety, and economically viable and safe coastal communities. Moreover, the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology's new report, *Charting the Course for Ocean Science in the United States for the Next Decade*, outlines numerous priorities which dovetail with Sea Grant's expertise. We believe that NOAA should take full advantage of Sea Grant's capabilities as it moves ahead with the ocean research priorities plan and the Sea Grant Association is committed to helping to bring our state-based research and education capabilities to bear in helping to address NOAA's mission.

While our individual programs use a state and regional approach in the support of research, education and outreach, each yields science-based information and experiences that can have national impact. For example, following the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the Gulf Coast in 2005, the Washington Sea Grant Program learned from Louisiana Sea Grant that there was an urgent need for a mobile boat hoist to help repair and re-launch commercial fishing boats damaged by the hurricanes. Donations from Washington Sea Grant and Alaska Sea Grant

The *Sea Grant Association* (SGA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering the Sea Grant Program concept. SGA's regular members are the academic institutions that participate in the National Sea Grant College Program. The SGA advocates for greater understanding, use, and conservation of marine, coastal and Great Lakes resources.

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

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made it possible to transport a donated 60-ton Travelift® from Alaska to Plaquemine Parish, Louisiana. Without that hoist to move displaced boats to dry land for repair, fishermen affected by the hurricanes would have been out of work for an extended period of time. Louisiana's Sea Grant partners helped to put them on the road to recovery.

Another important project currently underway in a partnership between the Maine and Hawaii Sea Grant programs involves the assessment and planning for initiatives to help our nation's coastal communities that are struggling with access to and utilization of our coasts. The results of a recently completed survey details how local coastal communities are struggling with the paradox of support for economic growth while honoring the need for working-waterfront and public access in those communities. This survey identifies innovative tools and policies being developed around the country. The findings will allow different regions of the nation to learn from one another and to identify opportunities for new research and other information transfer needs that Sea Grant and NOAA can help to meet.

Initiatives like the two described above are jeopardized by the existing NOAA funding level for the Sea Grant program. The Sea Grant program was funded at \$55 million in FY 2006 – a reduction of over 10% from the FY 2005 level. Under NOAA's plan for FY 2007, Sea Grant would be level funded again at \$55 million. Level or flat funding represents, in fact, a significant impact on our ability to serve the ever-increasing demands of the broad range of constituencies with whom we work; a reduction that is exacerbated by the rising costs associated with research, education and extension services. The SGA has been advised to prepare for as much as a 10 percent reduction in FY 2007. Given that the FY 2008 request continues this "freeze" for a third straight year – even though NOAA is requesting \$60 million in new funding to advance ocean science and research under the interagency ocean research priorities plan and implementing strategy -- the adverse consequences we are already experiencing will only become more pronounced in the coming year.

In real terms, a 10 percent reduction, on top of the reductions we took in FY 2006, would mean the termination of between 10 to 12 percent of key program management and extension staff nationwide. Some programs will have to terminate an average of 3 to 4 individuals, some programs will lose even more. In addition, success rates for submitted research proposals will drop from an average of about 1 in 4 to about 1 in 7 or 8. New and continuing projects will have to be delayed in FY 2007 which in turn will reduce available funding for important new research and outreach projects in FY 2008. These reductions will likely prevent many programs from moving ahead with new initiatives relating to regional research, increasing resilience to natural hazards, understanding the ocean's role in climate – particularly from a regional perspective, improving ecosystem health, open ocean aquaculture, and coral reefs.

At a time of heightened federal interest in support for ocean and coastal research as evidenced by the JSOST report, reducing Sea Grant's capacity to support the kind of competitive, merit-based research important for meeting national, regional, state-wide and local needs is counterintuitive. Finally, reducing federal (NOAA) support in turn harms each program's ability to leverage funds at the state and/or institution level. Reduced federal contributions to Sea Grant (and other coastal

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programs) will likely be perceived by individual stakeholders, communities, interest groups and state agencies as signs that the Federal Government's interest in ocean, coastal and Great Lakes issues has declined.

I am concerned that we are systematically weakening a well-managed, thoroughly reviewed, and highly competitive ocean, coastal and Great Lakes research and education enterprise by the funding decisions made over the last few years. I can appreciate that NOAA is confronted with many difficult decisions and resources are necessarily constrained. Nevertheless, we believe Sea Grant represents a critical investment in the long term health of our ocean, coastal and Great Lakes resources. As a result, I respectfully request your consideration of these views as NOAA moves to finalize the FY 2007 spending plan, and ask that you seriously consider providing some funding relief to this nationally recognized program to partially offset these impending impacts.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these views. If you have any questions or comments for SGA, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Paul S. Anderson
President, Sea Grant Association
Director, Maine Sea Grant Program