

Sea Grant Association

September 12, 2006

The Honorable Richard Pombo
Chairman, Committee on Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nick Rahall II
Ranking Member, Committee on Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pombo & Ranking Member Rahall:

On behalf of the Sea Grant Association (SGA), I am writing to urge you and your Committee to support the NOAA Organic Act (HR 5450) by acting favorably on the bill pending before your Committee. As an organization representing the thirty-one individual Sea Grant programs of the National Sea Grant College Program, we understand first hand the importance of statutory structure and support for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The NOAA Organic Act, as reported-out of the House Science Committee in June, is an important step as NOAA seeks to better align its priorities and research and education activities in order to fulfill its core missions.

As you know, the National Sea Grant College Program has been serving the country for four decades as the premier university-based research program at NOAA in support of coastal resource use and conservation. The thirty-one Sea Grant programs are located in coastal, Great Lakes, and Gulf Coast states and address the urgent and immediate needs of coastal managers through “place-based” science. It is the goal of the Sea Grant Program to effect change through science-based information, and in accomplishing this acts as a link between government, scientists, academia, industry, and the American public. In addition, its extension and outreach arms put its research results to use by providing local leaders and the public with the information needed to make wise management decisions. Sea Grant is a program in close partnership with the states and its federal funding is leveraged and matched by state and private funds.

Given the contributions NOAA, and the Sea Grant Program as a component part of NOAA, make to the economic and environmental health of the Nation each year, it is important that the agency be given the priority support it deserves. Both the Pew Oceans Commission (2003) and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (2004) called on Congress to adopt an organic act for NOAA. As the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy stated in its 2004 report, “The act should ensure that NOAA’s structure is consistent with the principles of ecosystem-based management and with its primary functions of assessment, prediction, and operations; management; and research and education (Recommendation 7-1).” SGA strongly believes that ocean policy needs to be grounded in sound science. Therefore, we are encouraged that HR 5450 addresses the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy’s recommendations by re-aligning NOAA’s function to support an ecosystem-based approach to management, thereby ensuring reliable science in the development of smart policy. In addition, considering the emphasis that the two commission reports place on regional approaches to ecosystem-based management, in order to succeed, ocean, coastal and Great Lakes research and governance will need to depend heavily on the Sea Grant program.

Sea Grant Association

Similarly, in the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative's 2006 report entitled, "From Sea to Shining Sea: Priorities for Ocean Policy Reform," the commissioners listed codifying NOAA as the second of ten most important actions Congress should take in responding to the two Commissions' reports. The experts agree – NOAA, as the "lead ocean agency," needs a formal structure in order to fulfill its mission.

We understand that the NOAA Organic Act is intended first and foremost to provide structure and stability for the agency. However, within the context of this letter we wanted to provide additional recommendations that should be considered when establishing law governing NOAA. First, enhanced funding for research is essential. Local, regional and national scale efforts are needed to provide the scientific foundation essential for effective ecosystem-based management of our coastal and ocean resources. Sea Grant Programs have a history of catalyzing such research and linking it to innovative outreach and education programs for managers, educators and other stakeholders. Investment in this intellectual infrastructure is key.

Second, it is imperative that the U.S. invest in the infrastructure of its coastal and Great Lakes laboratories. Currently, funds are inadequate in supporting basic laboratory facilities, instrumentation, support systems, computing facilities, and ship access. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy makes several recommendations on the need to develop and enhance the nation's ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes infrastructure.

On behalf of SGA, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share these views. We stand behind the recommendations of the two ocean commissions as they seek to improve the health, usefulness, productivity and vitality of our oceans. Passage of the NOAA Organic Act is a necessary step in that process and we hope that you and your Committee will seriously consider scheduling a markup of the legislation before the 109th Congress adjourns.

If at any time I can provide you with additional information about the Sea Grant Program or NOAA in general, 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

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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