

September 9, 2005

The Honorable Robert Byrd
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Byrd:

As the Chairs of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission respectively, we would like to express our deep appreciation and strong support for ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes funding provided in the Commerce-Justice-Science (C-J-S) appropriation bill currently under consideration by the U.S. Senate.

The C-J-S bill provides appropriations to three federal agencies that play lead roles in managing and studying the nation's oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The two Ocean Commissions independently found that increased funding for ocean-related science and management programs should be a top priority.

It is essential that this funding be increased as we struggle to address the growing number of challenges that comprise the capacity of our oceans and coasts to provide the economic services and ecologic resources that we have come to rely upon and enjoy. The depletion of major commercial fish stock, increases in harmful algal blooms, expanding hypoxic and anoxic zones in coastal waters, the spread of invasive species, problems with human and marine resource health associated with the continued release of water- and airborne contaminants, the loss of important habitat, and regional shifts in ecosystem physical processes, are clear indications that the marine environment and its resources are under severe stress.

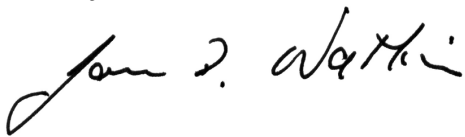
Recent advances in the marine sciences, much of which has been supported by federal funding provided through NOAA, NASA, and NSF, have helped us recognize and begin to understand complex and interrelated ocean-related physical, biological, geological, and biogeochemical processes. This new information has also increased our awareness of the sensitivity and susceptibility of the marine environment to anthropogenic and natural stresses. The nation must continue to move towards an ecosystem-based management approach, a process that will require not only additional funding support, but also Congress' guidance on facilitating greater cooperation and collaboration among federal, state, and nongovernmental entities.

In addition to supporting broader national ocean policy objectives, funding provided in the C-J-S bill will also greatly assist in the Hurricane Katrina recovery effort. This funding will allow NOAA and the

other relevant agencies to provide states with both short- and long-term support and services that will benefit the displaced population, as well as help initiate efforts to address the hurricane's significant impact on the Gulf's marine environment.

As was clearly demonstrated by the impacts associated with Hurricane Katrina, our nation's economy relies heavily upon goods and services provided by our oceans and coasts, in fact approximately half of the nation's GDP is generated in coastal watersheds. Continuing investment in the basic science and management programs that support the use and conservation of these resources and services is critical to the economic welfare of our nation. We respectfully request that the Senate support the funding levels provided for ocean-related programs and activities currently under consideration in the Commerce-Justice-Science spending bill.

Sincerely,



James D. Watkins
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)
Chairman, U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy



The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Chair, Pew Oceans Commission

cc:

Senator Thad Cochran
Senator Richard Shelby
Senator Barbara Mikulski