

Statement

**Admiral James D. Watkins, U.S. Navy (Retired) and
the Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Co-Chairs, Joint Ocean Commission Initiative
to the Inaugural Meeting of the New York Ocean and
Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council
October 3, 2006**

On behalf of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, we congratulate Governor Pataki, the New York State legislature, and the people of New York on this inaugural meeting of the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council.

You are all to be applauded for the foresight and leadership required to create this Council. In so doing, you have established a forum where the broad diversity of interests with a stake in the vitality of New York's ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources can discuss collaborative approaches to ensure that these resources are healthy and provide critical goods and services to the people of New York.

Our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes are subject to increasing pressure and degradation every day. Coastal development, over-fishing, atmospheric deposition, red tides, and a host of other insults are compromising health and vitality of our natural systems. To counter these dangerous trends, both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission recommended a new approach based on ecosystem-based management. Such an approach requires managing human activities in a way that recognizes and is responsive to the needs of the natural ecosystem, and also considers the essential links between different living and nonliving components of the land, sea, and atmosphere, including humans.

We are pleased to see ecosystem-based management adopted as a guiding theme in the Council's responsibilities. Among those responsibilities are coordinating state agency activities in order to integrate ecosystem-based management with existing programs, and integrating New York's private and public academia, research, and non-profit institutions more effectively in developing and advancing coastal-based ecosystem management. What you achieve in this regard will serve as an important model for other states and our nation as a whole. It will also hopefully stimulate greater support for regional collaboration among the mid-Atlantic states.

On behalf of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, we wish the Council success on its journey of developing a coherent regime for managing New York's marine, coastal, and Great Lakes resources. These resources are at risk, and, as the two Commissions emphasized in their respective reports, we have an historic opportunity to reverse the trends that threaten these essential, vital parts of our lives.

The time for action is now. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers rely on the state's oceans, coasts, and lakes for jobs, recreational opportunities, and more. We are confident that through the work of the Council this legacy will be preserved for generations to come.