

**REMARKS BY
COMMERCE SECRETARY DONALD L. EVANS
OCEAN WEEK CONFERENCE
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Good afternoon everyone. I want to thank our co-hosts in the House and Senate, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and all who share our commitment to healthy and productive oceans.

Teddy Roosevelt once said, "Nine-tenths of wisdom consists of being wise in time."

Today, with the draft recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy as the catalyst, we have a unique opportunity: we can work together to establish policies for the 21st century that will protect a precious, but threatened, legacy for generations to come.

I want to recognize Admiral Watkins and the members of the Commission for their time, their hard work, and their expertise in developing these recommendations. I also want to thank Senator Hollings, who's the sponsor of the Ocean Act of 2000 for his strong commitment to the oceans.

This is an exciting time to be involved in the oceans community. The nation and the world are focusing on the economic and environmental benefits of healthy oceans.

As you know, it's been 35 years since the last comprehensive review of U.S. ocean policy. It was one of the Stratton Commission's insightful recommendations that led to the creation of NOAA. They thought the nation needed the federal equivalent of a "wet NASA." Congress agreed. And for the first time, weather forecasting, fisheries management, navigational charting and ocean research were put under one umbrella in the Commerce Department.

It was a good move. Every day NOAA is gaining value for American taxpayers. For example, over the past three years:

- The NOAA Habitat Restoration Program restored over 11,000 acres of critical ocean habitat to benefit marine fisheries.
- NOAA expanded its suite of Electronic Navigational Charts from 65 to over 330. More than one million have been downloaded helping ensure, safe, efficient marine transportation.
- NOAA partnered with U.S. and Canadian scientists on a multi-million dollar research project to better-forecast harmful algal blooms, and, hopefully, reduce their negative impact. The 1977 outbreaks in the Chesapeake Bay cost the Maryland seafood and recreational fishing industries almost \$50 million in just a few months.
- NOAA had increased training to improve responses to oil and hazardous material spills and to help in the restoration of degraded natural resources.

It often surprises business groups I meet with, to hear first, that NOAA is in the Commerce Department. And second, that it is such a big part of Commerce. In fact, NOAA is the largest component of the whole Department. It makes up 65 percent of our entire budget.

But NOAA's placement in the Commerce Department was not arbitrary. Our historic mission at Commerce is to promote economic opportunity for all Americans. And the reality is that NOAA's products and services touch 30 percent of the nation's GDP every year.

As it says right up front in the new Oceans Policy report, "America's oceans and coasts are big business." How big you might ask? Well, let me share this with you. More than 95 percent of U.S. overseas trade by volume and 37 percent by value is waterborne – contributing \$740 billion to the GDP while employing 13 million Americans. U.S. consumers spend over \$55 billion for fishery products annually. More than half of the U.S. population – 141 million people -- lives within 50 miles of the coast. Coastal and marine waters support over 28 million jobs. And they provide a tourist destination for 189 million Americans each year.

The Commission calculated that the ocean economy would be the 27th largest state economy in the nation in 2000. Oceans are "among the chief pillars of our nation's wealth and economic well-being," the report declares. But the incentive for protecting our oceans and ocean resources is far greater than the economic benefits, as critical as they are. More than 3.5 billion people, over half of the world's six billion population, depend on the seas for their primary source of food.

The great majority of the world's living organisms are found in the oceans. Among these are animals like horseshoe crabs, which have a compound in their blood that the pharmaceutical industry uses to test intravenous drugs for bacteria.

Healthy oceans may hold the answers not only to cures for human diseases, but sustainable use of resources, and protection of endangered marine animals. We've made progress in unlocking the mysteries of the oceans. But more than 95 percent of the underwater world remains unknown and unseen.

There's more history under the sea than in all of the world's museums. We have better maps of the backside of the moon than we do of our own oceans. President Bush and all of us in this Administration take our environmental stewardship responsibilities very seriously. We welcome this new focus on ocean policy. We know how important oceans and marine resources are to our economy and to our well-being.

And, like you, we have families who love the shore. The President and I also have been known to enjoy some very pleasant hours out on a fishing boat. We're committed to developing new approaches and partnerships to build on our successes, and restore and sustain healthy oceans. And we're looking forward to reviewing the final recommendations in Admiral Watkins' report after all the comments are in.

I can tell you now that there are areas in the report that have long been priorities, and where we've already taken actions. For example, the Commission addresses ecosystem-based management. This is one of NOAA's fundamental strategic goals. Ecosystems are highly complex. A better understanding of species, habitat and their interactions is central to our efforts to protect and manage the nation's ocean and coastal resources.

Among the Commission's recommendations are proposals for increased marine research, exploration and observing systems. These are all areas in which NOAA maintains a leadership role. One of the more exciting recommendations involves creating an Integrated Ocean Observing system. This is the next frontier in environmental management. It represents a paradigm shift in how we view our planet.

Admiral Lautenbacher, NOAA's Under Secretary, is our point man for establishing a Global Earth Observation System. He's a terrific advocate for a system that has the potential to make the world safer, healthier and more prosperous.

A comprehensive global observing system will offer improved ocean monitoring and marine resource management. Right now, ocean observations represent the largest gap in global efforts. Better information about the mysteries of our oceans and our planet could aid in predicting and protecting against weather patterns that affect farmers, families and communities.

Already, improved predictions of the El Nino/La Nina patterns have allowed us to save millions of dollars in produce in the United States alone. Worldwide benefits to farmers due to El Nino forecasts are at least \$450 to \$550 million per year.

Last year, I was privileged to join Secretary Powell, Secretary Abraham, Secretary Norton, Admiral Lautenbacher and ministers from around the world to kick off the effort to develop a global observation system. And this past April, Earth Observation Summit II in Tokyo delivered on the charge from that initial Washington meeting. The 43 ministers and heads of national delegations agreed to a framework for the 10-year plan.

The goal is a system that is comprehensive, coordinated and sustained. What we need – and what we're working toward – is a system that fills in the missing pieces of the global environment puzzle. 35 years ago, a driving force for a new ocean policy was the conviction that the time had come for serious attention to our marine environment and to the potential resources of the oceans. From that effort came NOAA, the Magnuson- Stevens Fisheries Act, and the Coastal Zone Management Act.

With new and growing demands on our oceans and marine resources, it's time again to examine our ocean policy. Today, we have a new report and a new opportunity to effect changes that will support future use of the sea. The sportsman and author Ernest Hemingway wrote that "The world is a fine place and worth fighting for." Our oceans, too, are a fine place and worth fighting for.

Armed with insatiable curiosity, innovative technologies, the best scientists and oceanographers in the world, and a determination to preserve and protect the gifts of the sea, together we can create an ocean policy for the 21st century.

Finally, I have told you about the important work that NOAA conducts for a reason. The Administration believes that the timely passage of an organic act that codifies the establishment of NOAA is an important step forward in enhancing NOAA's ability to carry out the research and management objectives entrusted to it.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy recently stated support for a NOAA organic act in its preliminary report. Commission Chairman, Admiral Watkins, has testified before committees of both the United States Senate and the House of Representatives about the importance of passage of a NOAA Organic Act. I will be transmitting today, an Administration proposal for a NOAA Organic Act. I seek your support as we move through the process to enact this bill. Thank you.

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