

U.S. COMMISSION ON
OCEAN POLICY



Speech

By

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Opening

Thank you, Congressman Farr, and good morning ladies and gentlemen. I'm honored to be here today to once again help celebrate Capitol Hill Oceans Week and take part in the dialogue about preserving and managing the wonders of the ocean world. And, again, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, under the astute guidance of Lori Arguellas, has put together a tremendous and thoughtful program. My thanks to all members of the Foundation for their sustained leadership in ocean affairs.

Before I begin, I would like to reflect for a moment on a great leader who will lie in state in the Rotunda of the Capitol this evening and tomorrow. I had the privilege of serving President Reagan as his Chief of Naval Operations and the Chairman of his Commission on AIDS. He was a remarkable man and, in my view, one of the greatest presidents of the 20th Century.

Over the last few days, we have heard from many who note the legacy he leaves with respect to the end of the Cold War, a change in the direction of domestic policy, and a renewal of our faith in America. For you here today, I would also note that he had a direct impact on our oceans.

In 1983, President Reagan proclaimed the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone extending out to 200 nautical miles offshore. Our EEZ is the largest in the world, spanning over 13,000 miles of coastline and containing 3.4 million square nautical miles of ocean – larger than the combined land area of the 50 States. And, in 1988, Ronald Reagan proclaimed a 12-mile territorial sea for the United States, consistent with provisions of the Law of the Sea Convention.

As this audience is well aware, jurisdictional zones off the coasts of ocean nations play an important juridical and policy role in the way such nations carry out their maritime responsibilities. The United States is better off today in the conduct of our ocean policy because of the foresight of President Ronald Reagan.

Let me now turn to last night's kickoff event – and the five outstanding stewards of our seas who were honored there. The leadership awards were well placed indeed – I congratulate Senator Olympia Snowe and the Co-chairs of the Ocean Caucus, Representatives Curt Weldon, Sam Farr, Jim Greenwood, and Tom Allen. Their visionary work and devotion to this cause provide the solid foundation we need to move forward on a new national ocean policy. Our Commission thanks them as well for their leadership.

I'd also like to recognize three talented, dedicated members of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy who are with us today and are scheduled participants in a number of your panels. Their tireless efforts for the past two and a half years have made many special contributions to the Commission's report and to a healthy future for our country's oceans and coasts – Dr. Paul Sandifer, Dr. Andy Rosenberg, and Mr. Paul Kelly.

A Practical Blueprint

When I had the good fortune to address this forum last year, we were deep into drafting the 413-page *Preliminary Report*, a document I am certain each of you has committed to memory by now.

We believe that the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy's *Preliminary Report* offers a practical blueprint for ocean policy in the 21st Century by laying the groundwork for a coordinated, comprehensive national strategy, with a logical sequence of steps that can start immediately. The report includes almost 200 action-oriented recommendations that present workable solutions for some of the most pressing problems facing our oceans and coasts. Implementation of these recommendations will result in bountiful, sustainable oceans that benefit and inspire Americans for decades to come.

I'm happy to report that enthusiasm for the Commission's *Preliminary Report* extends well beyond those of us who have been admiring our own handiwork – in fact, we have been thrilled with the overwhelmingly positive reaction to the report's release on April 20th. Since that date, more than 163,000 copies of the full report have been downloaded from the Commission website. What is so gratifying about this response is that it bears witness to the kind of momentum still building and so badly needed to effect change. Momentum, particularly in this town, is a precious commodity that must not be squandered – and our actions from this day forward will determine whether our leaders will actually make a radical course change, or leave us in an even more precarious position than when we started.

When it comes to the oceans, thankfully, we have every reason to be optimistic. It's important to remember that although the troubles facing our oceans and coasts are real, they also present this nation with new and exciting opportunities for becoming better stewards of earth's greatest natural resource. We need you to help seize the moment and inspire implementation of the fundamental changes being proposed, not only for today, but for future generations.

Update on the Situation

So, here's where we are on the march to the *Final Report*. So far, we received comments from 34 Governors of States and territories and, I'm glad to say that most of their comments have been positive and supportive of the report. It's interesting to note that several of the Governors have expressed support for collaborative approaches among Federal, State, local and tribal entities, as well as increased funding for addressing their State-specific ocean and coastal issues. At this point, we will continue reviewing comments, look for common concerns and try to be as responsive as we can to any high-level policy issues which they raise.

Stakeholders

We also received over 750 comments from other interested stakeholders; and I would like to say something about that as well. To move the Commission's initiatives forward, and to advance through the remaining steps toward sensible stewardship of our oceans and coasts, will require strong public support. Judging by the stakeholder comments we have received already, there is enormous public interest in this subject with, in fact, many of those comments supporting our recommendations and thanking us for our work. As well, some of the most valuable commentary takes constructive issue with what we've recommended, but with an eye toward further strengthening our report.

This stakeholder input runs the gamut of issues ranging from: marine mammals, sea turtles, wind farms, bottom trawling, governance structures, Fishery Council reforms, fishery enforcement, and underwater cultural heritage; to: aquaculture, recreational boating and fishing, marine transportation, cruise ships, deterioration of water quality, and the need to educate the public about the human impact on our coasts and oceans.

We are reviewing and assessing this valuable input from the public. All their comments will become part of the final record of the Commission's work as has been our practice throughout the last two and a half years.

As with the Governors' comments so far, it's been gratifying to see so many of the other stakeholder comments offer broad support for the Commission, its findings and preliminary recommendations. This collective expression of general support affirms and bolsters our conviction that recommendations now on paper will be transformed into actions that can save our seas and coasts.

Priority Actions for Congress

With that as a background, let's put this morning's focus where it should be – on Capitol Hill, and the important role our elected leaders play in moving a new national ocean policy to the forefront of legislative action.

By now, you know the major thrust of what the Commission is recommending in the *Preliminary Report*. We don't expect you to have fully absorbed all 200 recommendations, but I would very much like you to focus your attention on the three that should be the top congressional priorities immediately.

- The first of these is to establish a new National Ocean Council in the Executive Office of the President to coordinate Federal ocean activities and help set national policy on a sustained basis – not every 35 years. The Council would include the leaders of all the ocean-related agencies and should be chaired by an Assistant to the President who can serve as a strong voice for ocean policy within the White House.

- The second is to pass an Organic Act to strengthen NOAA so that its growing responsibilities can be streamlined and better coordinated within an ecosystem-based approach to governance. The goal here is to give NOAA its own clear and unambiguous statutory basis for existing and to make it a stronger, more effective, science-based and service-oriented ocean agency.

Strengthening NOAA is actually the first of a logical three-phase process to strengthen and reconfigure the structure of Federal agencies to make them more effective and to minimize redundancies. The mid-term or “second phase” focuses on eliminating the many overlaps among ocean-related agencies by combining programs where possible; and we make some suggestions for the National Ocean Council to consider so doing. And, in the long-term or “third phase,” we’re suggesting that this nation will then be postured to move more efficiently toward a unified Federal agency to manage all natural resources in keeping with an ecosystem-based approach. If we carry out the first two phases well, then transition to the third phase should cause minimum disruption of programs underway.

- The third priority I would like to touch on is just as important as the first two. Here we are looking to Congress to establish an Ocean Policy Trust Fund in the Treasury, to be funded with Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas revenues that are not otherwise allocated, as well as with other potential “resource rents” from new and emerging uses in offshore waters. By dedicating these revenue sources to benefit Federal and State coastal efforts, we can provide a stable revenue stream to implement the nation’s new comprehensive national ocean policy. These funds would supplement – not replace – existing appropriations, and would support the new, expanded, or currently underfunded responsibilities recommended in our report. Establishing an Ocean Policy Trust Fund would signal the nation’s recognition of our commitment to help ensure a healthy future for our oceans, a priceless national resource.

Some have expressed concern that the revenue we propose to be deposited in the fund will encourage harmful activities on the Outer Continental Shelf. We are convinced that this is simply not true. Back in the mid-1980s, when Congress authorized some Federal offshore oil and gas revenues to be available to coastal states from an area immediately adjacent to State waters – a program which has resulted in over \$3 billion being distributed to seven States – there was no evidence that this made any difference in the decisions taken on offshore moratoria on the East or West coasts, or off of Florida.

The sole intent of the Trust Fund is to deposit unallocated OCS monies in the Treasury for ocean and coastal areas and the sustainability of ocean and coastal resources. Our Commission determined that the funds should come from ocean activities in Federal waters so that there is a clear nexus between the source of the revenues and their dedicated uses. But we also recommend comprehensive and balanced management

regimes – which will presumably utilize the NEPA process – to consider all factors before new offshore activities are authorized.

And, of course, since the establishment of the Ocean Policy Trust Fund is a matter within control of Congress, Congress can, in its wisdom, add whatever protections to existing law and policy it chooses.

The Final Steps

The Commission has several important steps to finish before we can deliver a final report to the President and Congress.

As I have noted, we are in the process of considering the Governors and stakeholder comments. And we also have our own internal process in which we have identified areas that need to be addressed.

For instance, we know that we need to make some adjustments in certain sections – particularly in Chapter 5, our “regional governance” chapter. Right now, we are clarifying our recommendations regarding the voluntary creation of regional ocean councils. Although we continue to believe that these councils are the way to go, we also realize that we need to be clearer about the roles we intend these councils to play. This includes emphasizing how the regional ocean councils should be formed through a bottom-up process based on the needs of each region, and that Federal agencies should support this process by improving their own regional coordination and their communication with State, territorial, tribal, and local decisionmakers. We are also clarifying our recommendations regarding how to improve user input in the development of enhanced regional information gathering efforts.

There will always be more to say and more comments to be heard, so it’s difficult to wrap up such a monumental effort. We know that some Governors and stakeholders wanted more time to contribute their thoughts. But we truly believe that everyone was given a fair allocation of time. The comment period on the *Preliminary Report* represented only one of several opportunities that Governors and other stakeholders have had, and will continue to have, to express their views on the development of a national ocean policy.

The Commission’s 15 public meetings, including nine regional hearings, provided an initial opportunity for input. Over 440 individuals participated in these forums, and over one-quarter of the participants came from State, tribal and local governments and interest groups.

Also let me remind you that in the 90 days after receiving the Commission’s *Final Report*, the President is directed by the Oceans Act of 2000 to consult with State and local governments, and other non-Federal interests, prior to submitting to Congress his statement of proposals to implement or respond to the Commission’s recommendations. So – even when it’s over, it’s not over!

Wrap Up

Although the report represents endless hours of hard work and the contribution of many of you in this room this morning, our effort pales in comparison to what needs to happen now. Reform of national ocean policy needs to start this year, while it is still possible to reverse distressing declines, to seize exciting opportunities, and to sustain the oceans, coasts and their valuable assets for future generations. We can't wait even five or ten years to make changes or it will be too late.

By rising to the challenge and addressing the many activities that are degrading the continent at its edges, America can protect the ocean environment, create jobs, increase Federal revenues, enhance security, expand trade, and ensure ample supplies of energy, minerals, food, and life-saving drugs. The nation's ocean and coastal assets are worth hundreds of billions of dollars to society and untold more to the Earth and its complex ecosystems. Although losses in some areas have been significant, in other areas sound policy and sustained investments have slowed or reversed harmful trends. Wise actions taken today, based on an ecosystem-based management approach, can restore what has been lost and create even greater benefits.

For centuries, Americans have been drawn to the sea. We have battled the tides, enjoyed the beaches, and harvested the bounty of our coasts. The oceans are among nature's greatest gifts to us. The responsibility of our generation is to reclaim and renew that gift for ourselves, for our children, and – if we do the job right – for those whose footprints will mark the sands long after ours have washed away.

Once again, thank you for having me here today.