



**PART 2**

**BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE:  
A NEW NATIONAL OCEAN  
POLICY FRAMEWORK**

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# ENHANCING OCEAN LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION

Some thirty-five years have passed since the Stratton Commission issued its influential report. The time has come again to consider significant improvements to the nation's ocean and coastal governance system—improvements that build upon that Commission's approach, while acknowledging societal and environmental changes and taking advantage of scientific and technological advances.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy believes that an effective, integrated national ocean policy can be achieved through implementation of a new National Ocean Policy Framework. Each of the chapters in Part II focuses on one component of this framework: national coordination and leadership (Chapter 4); a regional approach (Chapter 5); improved governance of offshore waters (Chapter 6); and a streamlined federal agency structure (Chapter 7).

## Making Improvements at the National Level

The previous chapters have illustrated many of the compelling reasons for addressing ocean and coastal issues in a new and improved fashion. There is a growing consensus about a number of ocean-related facts:

- The United States controls extensive resources in ocean and coastal areas that serve a wide range of national needs and are held in public trust.
- There are enormous opportunities for ocean science and technology to uncover new sources of energy, food, and drugs, and increase general understanding about the planet.
- Serious risks to living marine resources exist, and degraded ocean environments need to be returned to productivity.
- National security requires greater awareness, knowledge, and observation of ocean and coastal areas.
- Marine transportation needs to be enhanced to adequately handle growing demands from commerce and recreation.
- Improved understanding of the factors influencing global climate is needed, along with ideas for mitigating any adverse impacts.

Government agencies work on these and many other problems. However, a lack of communication, coordination, and a strong sense of partnership continues to inhibit effective action.

“Ocean issues” include virtually every aspect of the government’s duties, from promoting international commerce to protecting the environment, and from guarding national security to facilitating tourism and recreation. More than two-thirds of the fifteen existing cabinet-level departments, plus several independent agencies, play important roles in the development of ocean and coastal policy (Figure 4.1). Many individual programs within these departments and agencies administer specific initiatives that address varying, and sometimes overlapping, ocean and coastal issues. A few additional departments have a more limited role in ocean policy, usually through a single division, such as the U.S. Department of Justice’s Environment and Natural Resources Division.

A first step in enhancing the management of oceans and coasts, and a central part of the new National Ocean Policy Framework, is improving coordination among these many federal programs. A 1997 report by the National Research Council highlighted the need to harmonize ocean activities at the highest levels of government, with the objective of allowing federal agencies and the President to develop and carry out decisions within their authority.<sup>1</sup> The Pew Oceans Commission also recognized the need to coordinate federal agency activities and address interagency disputes.<sup>2</sup>

Although a number of attempts have been made to achieve better coordination, none of them is adequate to cover the breadth of issues involved. Some coordinating mechanisms deal with particular topics, such as ocean research, coral reefs, or marine transportation. Other efforts are broader, but still fail to encompass the universe of responsibilities illustrated in Figure 4.1.

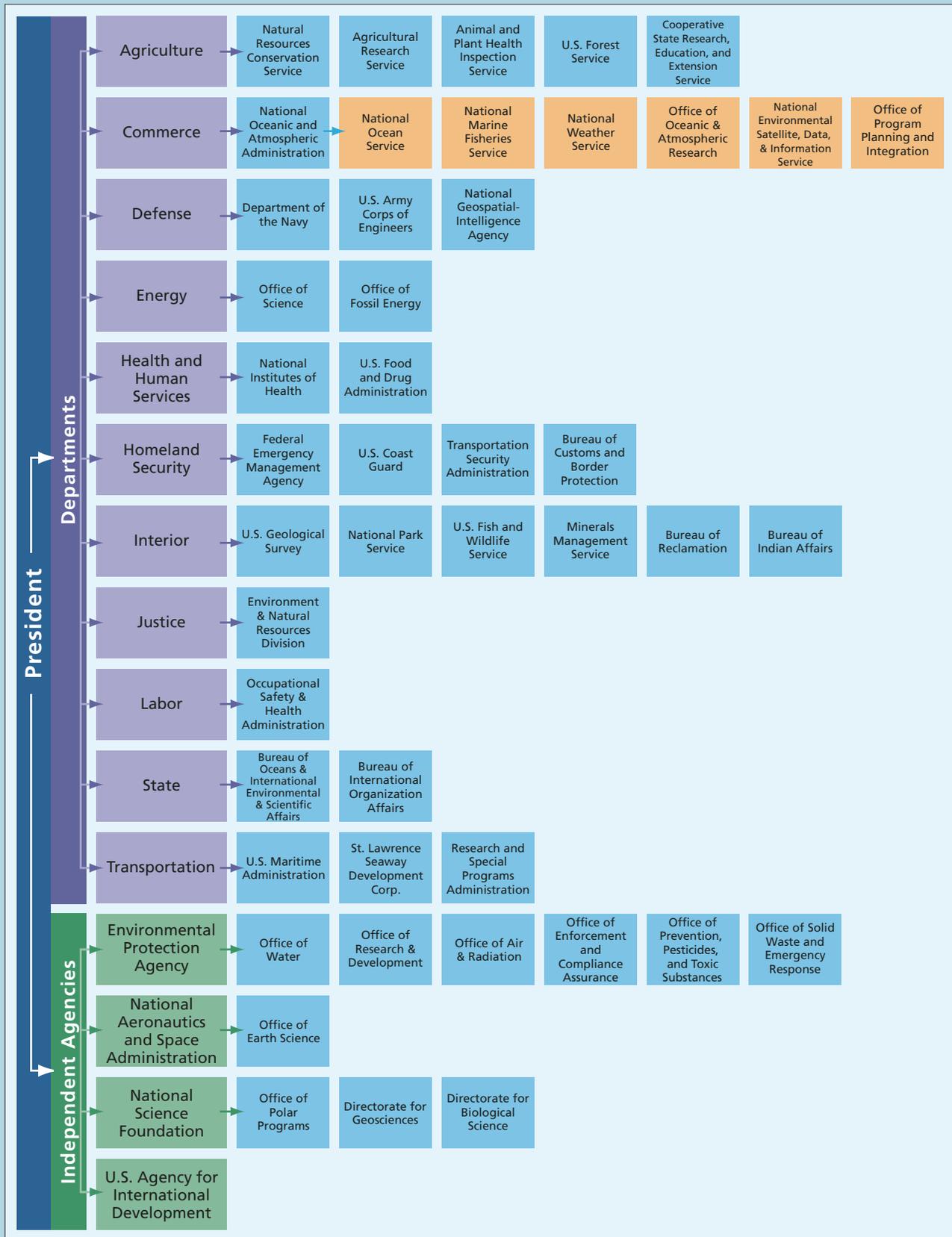
The importance of oceans to American society calls for greater visibility and leadership on ocean and coastal issues. Within the Executive Branch, only the White House can move past traditional conflicts among departments and agencies, make recommendations for broad federal agency reorganization, and provide guidance on funding priorities. Thus, the Executive Office of the President is the appropriate venue to provide high-level attention and coordination for an integrated national ocean policy.

There are three entities within the Executive Office of the President that have specific responsibilities involving, to some extent, oceans. The Office of Science and Technology Policy supports the National Science and Technology Council in addressing government-wide science and technology issues. Within this structure, a Joint Subcommittee on Oceans was recently established to coordinate national ocean science and technology policy. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) coordinates broad federal environmental efforts, oversees implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act, and serves as the principal environmental policy advisor to the President. Finally, the National Security Council’s Global Environment Policy Coordinating Committee includes a subcommittee to address international ocean issues.

While these efforts are helpful in their designated areas of interest, they fall far short of a high-level interagency council with the ability to deal with all of the interconnected ocean and coastal challenges facing the nation, including not only science and technology, environmental, and international matters, but the many other economic, social, and technical issues specifically related to the management of marine resources. In effect, in the Executive Office of the President, the whole of the oceans is greater than the sum of the marine-related parts of existing institutions.

Although legislative action will be needed to codify the establishment of an ocean leadership body and ensure a national commitment to and long-term stability for ocean issues, immediate presidential action can facilitate an early start to the process.

Figure 4.1 Ocean and Coastal Activities Are Conducted by Many Federal Departments and Agencies



The agencies and departments depicted have varying ocean and coastal responsibilities. Their number and diversity make it clear that coordination is essential to effectively manage the nation's oceans and coasts.

## Recommendation 4-1

Congress should establish a National Ocean Council (NOC) within the Executive Office of the President, and a nonfederal President's Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy to provide enhanced federal leadership and coordination for the ocean and coasts. While Congress works to establish these components in law, the President should begin immediately to implement an integrated national ocean policy by establishing the NOC and President's Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy through an executive order, and by designating an Assistant to the President to chair the NOC.

These recommendations are in line with developing international trends. The United States was a leader at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, which reiterated support for the principles developed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, including a call for better coordination of environmental policy at the national level.<sup>3</sup> Several nations, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Korea, and the Netherlands, have initiated strong national-level coordination on ocean and coastal policy.

## National Ocean Council

There is important historical precedent for a body such as the National Ocean Council. The Marine Science, Engineering and Resources Council, chaired by the Vice President, was established in 1966 by the same statute that created the Stratton Commission. That council was disbanded in the early 1970s after the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) was established. Since then, no interagency body has existed to coordinate multi-agency implementation of an integrated national ocean policy.

The National Ocean Council would oversee all existing and new ocean- and coastal-related interagency mechanisms and coordination efforts. The Council would not have operational duties; rather, it would have responsibility for planning and coordination, with support from a small staff and committees created to carry out specific functions.

## Recommendation 4-2

The National Ocean Council (NOC) should provide high-level attention to ocean and coastal issues, develop appropriate national policies, and coordinate their implementation by the many federal departments and agencies with ocean and coastal responsibilities.

The NOC should be:

- chaired by an Assistant to the President.
- composed of cabinet secretaries of departments and directors of independent agencies with appropriate ocean- and coastal-related responsibilities. Heads of other relevant executive departments, agencies, commissions, quasi-official agencies and senior White House officials should be invited to attend meetings of the NOC when appropriate.

The NOC should carry out the following functions:

- develop broad principles (based on those outlined in Chapter 3) and national goals for governance of the nation's oceans and coasts, and periodically review and revise these goals.
- make recommendations to the President on developing and carrying out national ocean policy, including domestic implementation of international ocean agreements.
- coordinate and integrate activities of ocean-related federal agencies and provide incentives for meeting national goals.
- identify statutory and regulatory redundancies or omissions and develop strategies to resolve conflicts, fill gaps, and address new and emerging ocean issues for national and regional benefits.
- guide the effective use of science in ocean policy and ensure the availability of data and information for decision making at national and regional levels.

- develop and support partnerships among government agencies and nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, academia, and the public.
- expand education and outreach efforts by federal ocean and coastal agencies.
- work with a broad range of nonfederal stakeholders, governmental and nongovernmental, to develop a broad, flexible, and voluntary process for the establishment of regional ocean councils to help advance regional approaches.
- periodically assess the state of the nation's oceans and coasts to measure the achievement of national ocean goals.

While the nation has made great strides in understanding the connections among the ocean, the atmosphere, and the rest of the living world, it has been less successful in applying this knowledge to the management of ocean and coastal resources. New ocean and coastal policies should avoid the common practice of managing one activity or one part of an ecosystem without considering the impacts on and influences of other parts, including its human inhabitants. Rather, ocean policies should promote an ecosystem-based management approach, placing human interests and activities squarely within the context of the larger environment.

Moving toward such an approach requires several steps: assessing the ecosystem, including human needs; minimizing any threats and promoting opportunities; monitoring the ecosystem to evaluate progress; and revising management measures as appropriate. As part of the move toward an ecosystem-based management approach, a precautionary approach (described in Chapter 3) should be incorporated into decision-making processes and adopted by the National Ocean Council in developing national standards for ecosystem-based management.

#### **Recommendation 4-3**

The National Ocean Council (NOC) should adopt the principle of ecosystem-based management and assist federal agencies in moving toward an ecosystem-based management approach.

As part of this effort, the NOC should:

- coordinate the development of procedures for the practical application of the precautionary approach and adaptive management.
- encourage agencies to incorporate preservation of marine biodiversity in their management programs and support further study of biodiversity.

#### **Assistant to the President**

One role of the National Ocean Council is to resolve policy disputes and reach consensus among federal departments and agencies. To achieve this, the Council will need to be chaired by a high-level presidential appointee who is not part of any department or agency represented on the Council.

#### **Recommendation 4-4**

The President should designate an Assistant to the President to provide leadership and support for national ocean and coastal policy.

The Assistant to the President should have the following responsibilities:

- chair the NOC.
- co-chair the President's Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy.
- lead NOC efforts to coordinate federal agency actions related to oceans and coasts.
- make recommendations for federal agency reorganization as needed to improve ocean and coastal management.
- resolve interagency policy disputes on ocean and coastal issues.

- reach out to state, territorial, tribal, and local stakeholders and promote regional approaches to ocean and coastal management.
- consult with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) director and NOC members to identify programs that contribute significantly to the national policy for oceans and coasts, advise OMB and the agencies on appropriate funding levels for ocean- and coastal-related activities, and prepare the biennial reports mandated by section 5 of the Oceans Act of 2000.

## President's Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy

In 1969, the Stratton Commission recommended establishment of a broadly representative, presidentially-appointed committee of nonfederal individuals to provide continuing advice in the development of a national marine program. In response, in 1971 Congress created the National Advisory Committee on Oceans and Atmosphere (NACOA). NACOA reported to the President and Congress, advised the Secretary of Commerce, and provided analyses, recommendations, annual reports, and special studies on virtually every aspect of ocean policy. NACOA ceased meeting in the late 1980s, due primarily to lack of political support. Nevertheless, the need it fulfilled is more imperative than ever. To adequately represent the full spectrum of national interests, the National Ocean Council and the Assistant to the President will need input from a variety of interested groups and individuals from outside the federal government.

### Recommendation 4-5

The President's Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy, a formal structure for input from nonfederal individuals and organizations, should advise the President on ocean and coastal policy matters.

The President's Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy should be:

- composed of a representative selection of individuals appointed by the President, including governors of coastal states and other appropriate state, territorial, tribal and local government representatives, plus individuals from the private sector, research and education communities, nongovernmental organizations, watershed organizations, and other nonfederal bodies with ocean interests.
- comprised of members knowledgeable about and experienced in ocean and coastal issues.
- co-chaired by the chair of the National Ocean Council and a nonfederal member.

## Other Needed Elements

### *Office of Ocean Policy*

Because the National Ocean Council will be responsible for planning and coordination rather than operational duties, and because its cabinet-level members are unlikely to meet more than a few times a year, the support of a small staff and committees will be required to carry out its functions and associated daily activities. It is important for strong links to be maintained among the National Ocean Council, its committees, other relevant entities in the Executive Office of the President, as well as among other ocean-related advisory councils and commissions. (All the elements of the proposed national ocean coordinating structure are illustrated in Figure 4.2.)

#### Recommendation 4–6

Congress should establish an Office of Ocean Policy to support the Assistant to the President, the National Ocean Council (NOC), and the President’s Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy. To provide staff support immediately, the President should establish an Office of Ocean Policy through the executive order creating the NOC and the President’s Council of Advisors on Ocean Policy.

The Office of Ocean Policy should be:

- composed of a small staff that reports to the Assistant to the President.
- managed by an executive director responsible for daily staff activities.

#### *Committee on Ocean Science, Education, Technology, and Operations*

A committee under the National Ocean Council will be needed to assume the functions of the current National Ocean Research Leadership Council (NORLC), plus additional responsibilities. The NORLC is an important effort at government coordination in one area. It was established by Congress in 1997 as the decision-making body for the National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP) to provide coordination and leadership of oceanographic research programs on the national level. In addition to the NORLC, NOPP includes a Program Office, an Ocean Research Advisory Panel, an Interagency Working Group, a Federal Oceanographic Facilities Committee, and an ocean observing office (Ocean.US).

NOPP has had difficulty fulfilling the original vision of the National Oceanographic Partnership Act, due largely to the NORLC’s lack of authority to ensure active participation by federal agencies. By placing the NORLC under the National Ocean Council, renaming it as the Committee on Ocean Science, Education, Technology, and Operations (COSETO), and broadening its responsibilities to include coordination, planning, and oversight of operational programs and education activities in addition to research, it will become more visible and more effective.

Because the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) plays an important role in government-wide science and technology issues, it is logical for OSTP to work closely with the National Ocean Council on these issues. In particular, a strong connection between OSTP and COSETO will be essential for providing coordinated, high-level advice to the President. The tasks of the existing Joint Subcommittee on Oceans under the National Science and Technology Council, which focus on coordination of ocean science and technology issues in the executive branch, would be appropriately subsumed by COSETO.

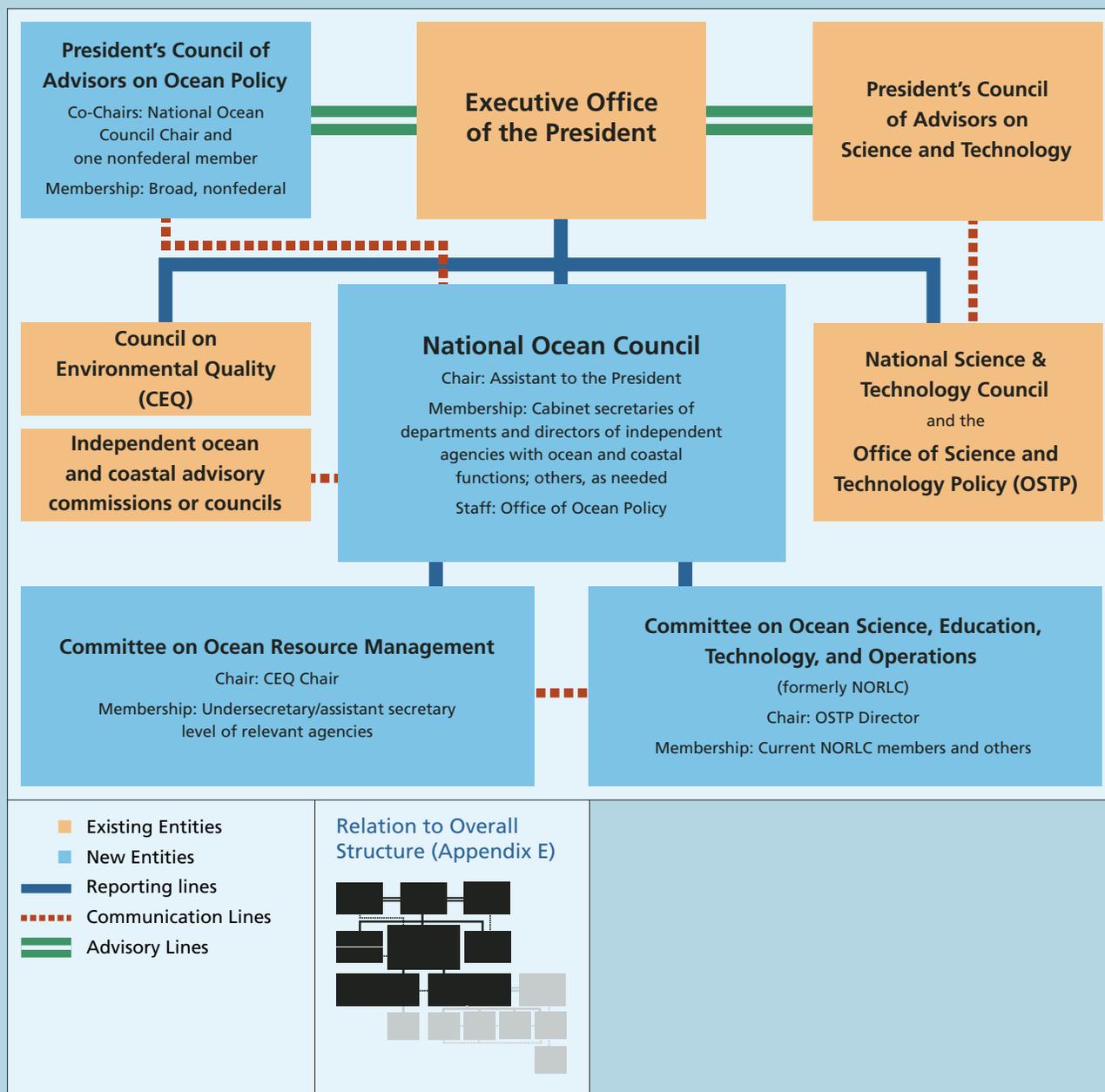
#### Recommendation 4–7

Congress, working with the National Ocean Council (NOC), should amend the National Oceanographic Partnership Act to integrate ocean observing, operations, and education into its marine research mission. A strengthened and enhanced National Ocean Research Leadership Council (NORLC) should be redesignated as the Committee on Ocean Science, Education, Technology, and Operations (COSETO), under the oversight of the NOC.

In particular, amendments to the National Oceanographic Partnership Act should specify that the newly-named COSETO:

- reports to the NOC.
- is chaired by the director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy to ensure appropriate links to government-wide science and technology policy and equity among participating federal agencies.
- includes in its mandate coordination and planning of federal marine facilities and operations, federal oversight of the Integrated Ocean Observing System, and coordination of ocean-related education efforts, in addition to its existing research responsibilities.
- includes existing NORLC members plus the director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences at the National Institutes of Health, the assistant

Figure 4.2 Proposed Structure for Coordination of Federal Ocean Activities



Shown here are the institutional components that should be established in the Executive Office of the President (EOP) to improve federal leadership and coordination of the nation's oceans and coasts. This diagram also illustrates the organizational relationship between these new components and existing units in the EOP.

secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the Department of Agriculture, and the undersecretary for science at the Smithsonian Institution.

- subsumes the current tasks of the National Science and Technology Council's Joint Subcommittee on Oceans.
- is supported by the Office of Ocean Policy.

#### *Committee on Ocean Resource Management*

In addition to COSETO, the National Ocean Council will need an equivalent working committee, the Committee on Ocean Resource Management (CORM), to coordinate federal

resource management decisions and policy. In general, interagency coordination ranges from simple exchanges of information on a voluntary ad hoc basis, to legally mandated coordination on specific issues such as climate, marine mammals, or habitat conservation.

Examples of formal coordination mechanisms on ocean-related issues include the Coral Reef Task Force, the Interagency Committee on the Marine Transportation System, Coastal America, and many others. Other formal coordinating bodies address broader issues with important ocean components, such as the National Invasive Species Council, the National Dredging Team, and the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture. Many of these efforts are discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this report, and most merit continued support. Indeed, additional task forces may be required to address new and emerging uses, such as the coordination of activities in federal waters. However, there is no high-level, cross-cutting oversight of these issue-specific efforts, limiting the federal government's ability to consider cumulative impacts, avoid conflicting mandates, and implement an ecosystem-based management approach. Better coordination is needed among existing ocean and coastal interagency groups—whether formal or informal—as well as among the ocean components of interagency groups with broader mandates.

Because of the Council on Environmental Quality's important role in environmental and resource management issues, this office, like the Office of Science and Technology Policy, should have a strong connection with the National Ocean Council.

#### **Recommendation 4–8**

The National Ocean Council (NOC) should establish a Committee on Ocean Resource Management to better integrate the resource management activities of ocean-related agencies. This committee should oversee and coordinate the work of existing ocean and coastal interagency groups and less formal efforts, recommend the creation of new topical task forces as needed, and coordinate with government-wide environmental and natural resource efforts that have important ocean components.

The Committee on Ocean Resource Management should:

- be chaired by the chair of the Council on Environmental Quality to ensure appropriate links to government-wide environmental policy and equity among participating federal agencies.
- include undersecretaries and assistant secretaries of departments and agencies that are members of the NOC.
- report to the NOC.
- be supported by the Office of Ocean Policy.

#### *Ocean-related Advisory Councils or Commissions*

In addition to the interagency coordinating groups discussed above, a number of independent ocean-related councils and commissions have been established by law (Appendix D). Some are no longer operational, such as NACOA, while others maintain active roles, like the Marine Mammal Commission. Strong connections will be needed between all existing bodies and the National Ocean Council.

#### **Recommendation 4–9**

The National Ocean Council (NOC) should review all existing ocean-related councils and commissions and make recommendations about their ongoing utility, reporting structure, and connections to the NOC.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> National Research Council. *Striking a Balance: Improving Stewardship of Marine Areas*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997.
- <sup>2</sup> Pew Oceans Commission. *America's Living Oceans: Charting a Course for Sea Change. A Report to the Nation*. Arlington, VA, May 2003.
- <sup>3</sup> United Nations. *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Johannesburg, South Africa, August 26–September 4, 2002*. New York, NY, 2002.