National Ocean Council and 2002 Farm Bill Implementation

NOC AND 2002 FARM BILL IMPLEMENTATION

(PowerPoint slide presentation in process.)

DR. SANDIFER: Trust this is the last one for
the day, unless somebody forces me to go forward. The national coordinating body, not the National Ocean Council, this again is an attempt to look at --

CHAIRMAN WATKINS: Wait a minute. We have agreed to morph the "national coordinating body," body being perhaps comatose, to the "National Ocean Council."

(General laughter.)

CHAIRMAN WATKINS: The National Ocean Council, we have not finally resolved all of the various functions that it is going to perform, but that is the placeholder at this point for "coordinating body." I don't like to get it all mixed up here. We have had to define things like "documents," "segments," "sections," and "chapters." We are trying to keep our linguistics common here.

The National Ocean Council is the coordinating body. I do not want to put another acronym into our system at this point. If there is no objection from the
rest of the Commission, I would like to keep National
Ocean Council at this point as the placeholder for
writing purposes so that we are all lobbing our grenades
into the NOC. Let's keep doing that into we decide what
it will be.

MR. RUCKELSHAUS: Good. I'm with you.

DR. SANDIFER: I am all for lobbing grenades.

All right, this again was an attempt to look at the considerable conservation measures within the 2002 Farm Bill and the far-reaching implications for nonpoint source pollution management and make some suggestions from Stewardship as to how the National Ocean Council might affect implementation of those conservation measures.

Again, looking at a specific goal, would be for the National Ocean Council to work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to ensure that the conservation programs in the farm bill are implemented effectively, specifically to support and encourage Agriculture's efforts to implement the farm bill, with emphasis on maximizing the conservation programs' benefits for water quality.
I understand that USDA's typical commodity support programs were more focused on maximizing, getting support payments to farmers. In this case, we would ask Agriculture to spend a bit more effort on maximizing the
actual benefits of these programs with relation to water quality in particular.

We say, further, that the National Ocean Council should consult with the USDA and other interested agencies as they develop specific measurable national goals for nonpoint source that USDA would have a lead role in achieving.

Again, what we are trying to do is help guide the implementation of farm policy in such a way that there is significant measurable improvement or reduction in nonpoint source pollution over the six years of this likely life of this Act with the long-term view of being able to demonstrate that it was so effective in reducing nonpoint source pollution that it ought to be re-upped and perhaps even more money put into it.

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DR. SANDIFER: The National Ocean Council would work with USDA on specific priority initiatives including the role of the state conservationists in nonpoint source control, providing technical assistance either to Natural Resources Conservation Service or
through the Natural Resources Conservation Service to
interested farmers, helping them focus on those kinds of
conservation practices that would gain them the
financial support and would also result in measurable
improvements in nonpoint source pollution reduction.

Next, see if we could help USDA link some of
these subsidies or the grants that would be received to
the imposition of best management practices for
conservation, again related to nonpoint source
pollution.

Also as a suggested priority initiative is the
review of commodity policies within USDA to see if there
are some other places that they might be able to tweak
their programs a little bit to continue payments but in
such a way that you have got other improvements in
nonpoint source control; to consider the potential for
carbon sequestration through farm activities as a
potential form of controlling atmospheric pollution.

Finally, we suggest that NOC work with USDA on priority initiatives to look at research and marketing efforts within Agriculture that in some cases promote -- that is, shifting from one crop to another -- less
conservation-oriented practices rather than more

conservation-oriented practices simply by commodity

supports or marketing support.

These were the kinds of things that we

suggested that the National Ocean Council should take

the lead on. This does not supplant in any way the role

of USDA. However, it makes sure the ocean leadership

understands the importance of the farm bill as a means

of helping to control nonpoint source pollution, and it

communicates to the USDA how important controlling of

NPS is to the health of coastal environments and,

ultimately, to the health of the farmers and the farm

community and the mechanisms by which that communication

might be most effective. That is what it boils down to.

MR. EHRMANN: Commissioner Rosenberg?

DR. ROSENBERG: Thank you.

I am concerned that we need to make sure that

issues like farm bill implementation are brought into
the structure that we are at least talking about that we are proposing creating. Here we are talking about the National Ocean Council, but it seems to me that these recommendations should clearly indicate that the farm
bill activities need to be integrated into the watershed council, or if you like ecosystem-based management, efforts in the regions.

It is not simply a matter of support and encourage effort on water quality. It is that USDA's efforts should emphasize maximizing the conservation benefits for watershed management, because there is more than just water quality.

I realize that it is a little bit awkward because we haven't talked about all of the structure issues in the same meeting, but it does seem to me that the National Ocean Council should be ensuring that the farm bill work ties into the watershed council, the ecosystem-based management work that we are proposing, so that you in fact have an integrated program.

This doesn't quite say that, but I think it is meant to go in that direction. I think we should be very specific that we want it to be integrated with
other programs, not simply remind the USDA that they
should focus on conservation programs.

DR. SANDIFER: Andy, well spoken. The section
that deals with watersheds does include some specific
language relative to inclusion of the farm bill
activities, NRCS activities. However, you are
absolutely correct that what we need to provide to have
the direction coming from the top of the National Ocean
Council and the top of USDA, that that linkage needs to
be done at the watershed and local level. It is
probably missing from this list of bullets here, so we
will fix that.

MR. EHRMANN: Commissioner Borrone?

MRS. BORRONE: Thank you.

I think that nonpoint source pollution is one
of the most significant issues that we have to deal with
as we put our report together, and so I want my comment
to be interpreted with that understanding.

I think these are excellent recommendations,
but I think they go way too far in being prescriptive to
the National Ocean Council. What I am thinking about is
we have spent a lot of time in the Governance Committee
discussions about wanting to assure that the National Ocean Council's role is one of policy setting or assisting in policy setting, helping to assure agency responsibilities are being carried out, working with the
agencies to set goals for achievement of the national
objectives, and doing the coordination things that can
be done to assure that federal agencies are working in
effective a cooperative fashion together as well as in
their individual program implementation activities.

However, we have also tried to be very careful
in not overloading the National Council with the
responsibilities for the management, oversight, or
control of other agencies. I think what you have
prepared is an excellent package of examples of an
approach or a concept that could be very effectively
worked through with Agriculture without saying, in the
degree of definitiveness that we have done in this, that
these are the things the NOC should do.

I am trying to sort of walk a fine line, and I
hope I am being clear about that. I am not arguing with
what you have put together. I think staff has done a
great job. I assume it has been with the help of
Agriculture, particularly since in the paper you even put in the caution that you would want to work with Agriculture to make sure that these ideas really have viability.
DR. SANDIFER: Lillian, I think this gets to the core of some discussion we will have tomorrow as to how many things we really want to put onto the National Ocean Council. If you simply struck NOC from this kind of recommendation and said, "These are the recommendations or things that need to be done at the national level," our working group would probably be okay with it. All of us have struggled with how much do you put on the Council, per se.

My concern, however, still is that left to its own devices the USDA responds to farmers, it does not respond to NPS issues in the water. Maybe it is that NOC would ask EPA and USDA to work together to resolve this. Maybe that would be the way to get it done, I don't know. However, these are the things we thought had to be elevated to the national level.

MRS. BORRONE: Well, I don't agree with you.

All I am suggesting is that as we get into that
discussion we be clear about how much we are going to
put on the NOC to do either as a tasking organization
against the national objectives that it may be
establishing or national policies that it may be
recommending that the other agencies have an obligation
to carry out and that the NOC may coordinate.

All I am saying is that I think you have done
good work, but we should use it as an example of the
kind of concept or approach that we think has to be
implemented, regardless of who actually gets the final
designation for it.

DR. SANDIFER: Agreed.

MR. EHRMANN: Admiral Watkins?

CHAIRMAN WATKINS: Can I follow up just on
that point?

MR. EHRMANN: Yes.

CHAIRMAN WATKINS: I agree with Lillian that
we have to come to grips with what kind of burdens we
are going to put on the National Ocean Council, but I
would hate to do that now. I would rather lob them over
the fence into the National Ocean Council at this point,
and then sit back when we hear from everybody and
decide, "What have we just done to this National Ocean Council?" That is a different approach.

If we put another variable into our thinking that we don't need a coordinating body out front because
we may overburden something downstream, let's wait until
we get everything in and then decide, "My, God, we have
built a monster here that probably can't handle it."

However, by doing that what we do is we
justify the urgent need for not only coordination at the
federal level, but coordination down through the regions
of the country. We have built justifications
overwhelming the need for this cooperative effort. How
we deal with it then and where we might be able to foist
off some of this responsibility elsewhere, I think, is
another issue. I would like to defer overburdening NOC
at this point, if you all agree.

MR. EHRMANN: Admiral Gaffney, on this point.

ADMIRAL GAFFNEY: Thank you.

I think that every time we refer to the "NOC"
my impression we were thinking about supra-agency level,
something had to be done supra-agency above an executive
agency. What that is we don't know yet.

Generally, and I think in this case, when we dealt with the State Department, the same thing, they need some resources, technical resources, that know what they are talking about to make this particular bill work
better. The NOC can marshal that kind of talent, so I
think that’s what was behind this.

What we don’t know yet is whether the NOC is
going to be a policy coordination group, a program
review group, an actual budgeting group that has a
budget, or whether it is going to be an operational
group.

Depending on how you structure it, if you look
at the National Security Council, that is one model that
has some of those features. If you look at the NORLC
with its substructure, it actually has some operational
functions. We can structure it any way we want to. I
still think until we hear your recommendation I think it
is a wide open issue.

MR. EHRMANN: Commissioner Coleman?

DR. COLEMAN: I have not read in detail the
farm bill, but I do know that there is a considerable
sum of money requested for monitoring purposes for sampling the riversheds, and so forth.

MR. WAYLAND: (No microphone.) There is very little for monitoring.

MR. WILLIAMS: (No microphone.) Very little.
DR. COLEMAN: Okay. Well, then, let me rephrase it.

MR. BOWEN: That is one of our recommendations.

DR. COLEMAN: What is that?

MR. BOWEN: That is one of our recommendations is to enhance the resources available for monitoring.

DR. COLEMAN: Okay, good. Well, that was going to be my suggestion. I would also increase that to every agency that samples the river. I live on the bank of the Mississippi River, and we have probably decreased discharge because of it. The USGS, the Corps of Engineers and 10 state agencies, they all do different tests off different samples. Since the USDA is very good at acquiring data, they are exceptionally good at it. Why not just recommend that enough funds be put in there to set up some national standards for sampling, even if you have
got to get the NRC to say, "What do you need to sample,"

and so forth? I would urge you to look at that

approach.

MR. EHRMANN: Commissioner Ruckelshaus?
MR. RUCKELSHAUS: Let me say that this is the kind of problem that I think precisely fits both what the country needs and what the National Ocean Council could address. I mean, think about what we have.

We have a problem that has been around for as long as people have been around. It was identified over 30 years ago as an important enough problem to give to one agency the responsibility to help solve it, EPA, their water quality standards which an awful lot of this runoff violates.

The top-down, standard-setting enforcement process that EPA used effectively for point sources simply does not work for these nonpoint sources, and they have now gone to the major water pollution problem of the country.

We have in the Agriculture Department a new bill with enhanced conservation funds available. We have had after EPA's initial assignment EPA and NOAA
being given a joint responsibility for dealing with nonpoint source pollution, and that has not worked, either.

We have seen what has worked. In my view, the
National Ocean Council, if it were acting as I would envision it, would designate these three agencies, that all of them sit on the National Ocean Council and come up with a plan for how they intend to deal with the nonpoint source problem and come back to this Council and tell us how they intend to do it.

There is nobody telling them to do that now. Maybe they get an assignment like that through some sort of budgetary review, but there really isn't anybody looking at the substance of the problem at the national level and saying, "This is just a disgrace that we are not getting at this problem better." What is it that it is going to take in order for us to be successful?

A lot of the things that you have in here -- technical assistance, BMPs, commodity policies, sequestration -- all of those things should be part of a plan along with a lot of other things, if they really sit down and do it, how are we going to get from here to
there and how are we going to measure progress, all of
the things that are necessary for any social program to
work.

If that National Ocean Council seizes its role
when faced with a problem like this that we have been at for decades and haven't solved, then we have got to get at it. It is just terrible that we are not getting at this more effectively. Since that is generally within our responsibility and it is impacting the oceans adversely, let's get these people together and coordinated their efforts and come up with a plan that will involve local governments, state governments and farmers.

I mean, nonpoint source also involves cities and suburban streets. Highways that have runoff are big contribution to it. Probably, the Department of Transportation should be involved, and maybe even HUD should be involved.

If this Council is sitting there and it has the authority to put together teams to develop a plan for the country to deal with this more effectively, we
are going to be better off. I think that is precisely
the case. In fact, I would use this as an example in
our report of the kind of thing that the Council could
do that would be very effective in dealing with an old
problem that we haven't figured out how to solve.
DR. SANDIFER: Bill, that is essentially what we were trying to get across. You have done it better than we have. You speak more eloquently than I.

(General laughter.)

DR. SANDIFER: However, the point really is the one we originally made with regard to, Why do we need a national coordinating body, a national council? You have to have somebody with enough clout to tell the agencies to get together and do something. You don't tell them what to do. You tell them to go and do a plan or to get something to come back to you with.

Our focus here on the farm bill is recognition, one, that farms are a significant source, not by far the only source but a significant source, of nonpoint source nutrients; and, number two, that the farm bill itself probably provides the greatest financial vehicle available to make measurable progress in diminishing that runoff problem.
Here is something that the Council could do,
work exactly through the mechanism you talk about, take
these three agencies or four agencies and go in a corner
and bring us back a real plan, and then do it. That is
the intent.

MR. EHRMANN: Admiral?

CHAIRMAN WATKINS: We will close on this issue. Going back to Jim Coleman's discussion and our discussion on the existing Ocean Partnership Act and the relationship of that Act to the National Ocean Research Leadership Council that is in being today, recall that the Department of Agriculture is not listed in that law as a member of the NORLC.

I have asked the NORLC twice to take the initiative, Congress will approve it in a minute, and get them on the list. They are part of the ocean issue, and they are a big part of the research issue particularly in this area and a whole host of other areas we are going to talk about tomorrow.

I think that it is important to put that in up front. This is something that I believe in, and in an
Executive Order can be done right away. If we have an Executive Order that begins the move, there will be no opposition on the part of the Congress to avoid the fact that we have put the Department of Agriculture on it. We just inform them up there, and hope that
the next time they change the law there that there is
not going to be any objection. I would urge us to do
that, to make the Department of Agriculture a key part
of the national ocean policy, and not just assume that
the farm bill is the linkage. I think it is bigger than
that. If that is agreeable with everybody, we would
like to push in that direction.