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Testifying as Chair of the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine
Environment to
The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
Panel on Regional Coordination of Ocean Policy

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Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment regarding regional coordination of ocean policy. The Council, created in 1989, consists of representatives appointed by the Governors of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine, and by the Premiers of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Within the 64,000 square mile Gulf of Maine watershed, the mission of the Council is to maintain and enhance environmental quality and allow for sustainable resource use by existing and future generations. In its most recent five-year action plan, the Council has identified three priorities: (1) protect and restore coastal and marine habitats; (2) protect human health and ecosystem integrity; and (3) encourage sustainable maritime activities. After nearly 13 years, the Council has never produced a map showing political boundaries, indicating our focus on holistic ecosystem management.

The Council has been held up as a model of regional and international cooperation and I believe it deserves this reputation. However, the Council's success depends on the measures one uses to evaluate it, and from that standpoint it is important to understand what the Council is and what it is not. First, let me tell you what it is not. The Council was not created in response to any immediate crisis and was not designed to usurp regulatory or management functions of state, provincial, and national agencies or legislative bodies. Administratively, it is not large: apart from two of three core staff members, the Council hires individuals for specific tasks, under time-limited contracts, and many projects are assigned to employees of the member jurisdictions. It has neither sought to undertake large-scale projects on its own, nor has it become directly involved in management activities which are the responsibility of other jurisdictions or agencies, such as fish harvesting or aquaculture siting.

Well, then, what is this Council? First, the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment was created to provide a framework for trans-boundary and regional cooperation on ocean and coastal policy, both between and among the U.S. states and the Canadian provinces. Its genesis was at the state and provincial level as a practical approach to trans-boundary issues, and federal partners were quickly added. The Council focuses on issues that utilize the strength provided by the Council's structure, which is based on common goals and cooperation, and the Council is careful to choose priorities

that fit these criteria. For example, polluted shellfish beds exist throughout the region and addressing the causes is a high priority for all Council members, but solutions tend to be local in nature and do not require a trans-boundary effort. Other issues, such as coastal land protection and salt marsh restoration, yield significant benefits when done through a coordinated effort, and the successful control of aquatic nuisance species clearly requires a joint approach. No matter how good an invasive species control program may be in one state or province, it is a futile effort if neighboring jurisdictions are not taking similar steps.

Many issues discussed at Council and working group meetings result in or support related initiatives, some of which continue to be administered under the auspices of the Council. For example, through the Gulfwatch program, we have created over 10 years of data on pollutant levels in blue mussels. Other efforts form separate entities, such as the creation of the Regional Association for Research on the Gulf of Maine (RARGOM), to coordinate research efforts undertaken by the region's extensive list of world-famous marine science institutions, or GoMOOS, our regional ocean monitoring system that you heard about yesterday, though the activities of both groups are still discussed and supported by the Council. The forum provided by Council meetings helps ensure unified and consistent methods for data collection and resource management. To disseminate valuable information about the Gulf of Maine, the Council has published a quarterly newspaper, the Gulf of Maine *Times*, and develops other outreach materials, maintains a useful Web page, and sponsors semi-annual meetings on both sides of the Hague Line.

This cooperative framework is also successful by others measures that are extremely important, but difficult to quantify: information-sharing, learning by example, and trust. Although Boston was once ridiculed for its sewage-tainted Harbor, our clean-up efforts now provide valuable lessons to Canadian officials struggling with similar problems. Conversely, the Canadians are far more advanced on ocean mapping and integrating cultural information into policy decisions. Having practical, rather than just theoretical, examples of success is extremely important. And after working together for thirteen years, even though there have been changes in the participants of the Council and its working group, there is an institutional structure maintained by the members through which professional relationships, trust, and friendships have developed. If I need to find out how New Brunswick deals with Marine Protected Areas, or what Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans has done on ocean zoning, I know who to call and know that I may rely upon them for advice and assistance.

Second, the Council is lean and mean from a fiscal perspective and we try not to bite off more than we can chew. We choose trans-boundary priorities that play to the Council's strengths and neither clutch our successful programs nor absorb existing ones if another suitable home can be found. Under this approach, the Council must carefully decide which among many competing projects to fund, ensuring buy-in and commitment among Council members. Although the Council has received generous support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the *modus operandi* continues to be a focus on projects with tangible, measurable results that directly support the Council's priorities.

Third, unlike the Gulf of Mexico, the Great Lakes, or Chesapeake Bay, residents in the Gulf of Maine watershed have not, in recent times, shared a regional identity directly linked to the Gulf. The Council hopes to change that situation. Among some of our Canadian colleagues on the Council, I have heard the clean-up of Boston Harbor referred to as the Southern Bay of Fundy habitat restoration program, and we in turn refer to the world-famous 50-foot tides in Outer Outer Boston Harbor. From the perspective of a marine environmental system, both monikers apply, as in many ways the Gulf acts like a large lake, partially hemmed in on the seaward side by Georges Bank. But many residents within our region do not make the connection between the waters off Nauset Beach on Cape Cod and those off Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Cape Small, Maine, Grand Manan Island in New Brunswick, and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Through financial assistance, small implementation grants, and publications, the Council has sponsored and supported a variety of activities designed to raise people's awareness about this great water body off our shores. A recent kayaking expedition along the Gulf, elementary school competitions on the Gulf of Maine ecosystem, and the Council's highly informative maps are examples that help promote this regional identity.

Fourth, you are all probably well aware of the problems with the New England fisheries stocks and their impact on this important industry. The council is not directly involved in this issue for several reasons, including the fact that it has no legislative mandate, and in particular no mandate to regulate fisheries resources (unlike fisheries management councils), and there are several existing mechanism in place to manage fish stocks. Instead, the Council has focused on issues that are very directly related to the future of the Gulf's fisheries resources. By examining pollutant levels, the health of estuaries, benthic habitat, wetlands restoration, marine protected areas, and ocean zoning, the Council is taking proactive steps to encourage better management of the Gulf of Maine. Though less public than the fisheries closures in the Gulf of Maine, the protection of habitat and coordinated approach to managing competing uses for offshore resources – wind farms, pipelines, wave-generated power facilities, and large-scale aquaculture – have direct and potentially significant impacts on the Gulf of Maine fisheries.

The Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment was created as a cooperative body and has succeeded in establishing a framework for continued cooperation in research, education, data collection, and policy development. This foundation has helped ensure the longevity and prosperity of the Council, and has left us better prepared to deal with threats to the environment through the research, institutional structures, and relationships that have been developed on and through the Council. It has enhanced rather than supplanted the authorities of its member political jurisdictions and provided a forum for businesses, nonprofits, residents, and government officials – all stakeholders in the Gulf of Maine and its watershed.

As the Commission considers regional ocean policy issues beyond the Gulf of Maine, there are several lessons that can be learned from our experience of more than a decade. We have grouped these lessons learned in two categories, and have included with each a recommendation for the Commission to consider.

The first general lesson is to focus on regional needs shared by all partners:

- Emphasize regional issues that require collaboration or cooperation to be effectively addressed;
- Be inclusive in priority setting and provide adequate time for priorities to emerge;
- Initially take on tasks that can be achieved – look for quick successes;
- Build relationships with others that are lasting and productive;
- Focus on a small number of priorities and prepare a plan or strategy to achieve them;
- Set bold targets and be visionary; and
- Adopt measurable goals, create baselines and track progress -- these produce accountability.

We recommend that changes be made at the federal level to more fully encourage, recognize, and support regional approaches to marine ecosystem management that incorporate these characteristics. However, some flexibility in the structure of regional councils is also needed, as ours is but one of several models.

Second, maintain continuity in commitment, leadership and staffing. Specifics include the need to:

- Develop a proactive agenda that causes people at the right level to participate;
- Recognize that inertia and culture often impedes progress – develop approaches to overcome these obstacles;
- Create and nurture champions;
- Steadfast commitment, by staying the course, pays off; and
- Develop and monitor indicators of commitment (e.g., contributions of staff time and money, participation in meetings, realignment of agency priorities with regional plan, outspoken advocate for effort, etc.).

Even though we hold up the Council as a product of state and provincial cooperation, the institutional, technical, and financial support of the federal government we have received has been invaluable. We recommend that the Commission encourage incentives for federal agencies to participate in and support regional initiatives as equal partners.

I hope my comments here today are helpful to the Commission as it examines regional coordination of ocean policy. Thank you for the opportunity to address this topic.