

••••Testimony for the Commission on Ocean Policy
Congressman Sam Farr
Tuesday, November 13, 2001

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

This commission is undertaking an extremely difficult job. It has it has been over 30 years since the Stratton commission made a similar effort and this is long overdue. Although the commission is new, the work of this commission has really been occurring with increasing interest and intensity over the past three decades. In just the past few years we have been numerous initiatives that have produced reports and recommendations including the President's Panel on Ocean Exploration, the PEW Oceans Commission, the Oceans Conference in my district in Monterey, many activities associated with the Year of the Ocean.

When you consider all this activity as a whole it is clear that there is a great need and interest to move forward with broad initiatives that will fit into a comprehensive ocean policy. It is my greatest hope for this commission that you will be able to assimilate and build on these efforts, and, in doing so, instill in Congress and the Administration some of the enthusiasm and desire for progress that is so evident within the ocean community.

Because of the fragmented nature with which we address these issues it is difficult for us in Congress to view them with the kind of perspective that this commission will have. You will speak with all the combined authority and experience of your members and with the objectivity from having been chosen in a bipartisan process by Congress and the Administration. By passing the Oceans Act and appointing this commission, Congress and the Administration have collectively asked you to do this job and to give us your recommendations, and so we are at least obliged to listen, which is a start, but it's not nearly enough.

This commission can only do half the work. We in Congress and the Administration have to do the other half by implementing your recommendations. I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of my other co-chairs from the House Oceans Caucus, to offer the assistance of the House Oceans Caucus and our staff to help this commission in any way we can in facilitating your interaction with Congress.

I know very well through my experience as a resident and representative of a coastal district, and through my interaction with the ocean community as co-chair of the House Oceans Caucus, that it is impossible to qualify which issues are most important. I would however like to mention several that stand out in my mind through recent experience.

Fisheries management

Having grown up in Monterey and witnessed the collapse of the once productive California sardine fishery, the protection of our nation's fisheries is one issue of particular concern to me. You only need to look back at the Stratton commission report to see that our attitudes about the management of our fisheries have gone through a dramatic evolution. Promotion and capitalization of our fisheries were important priorities in 1969, while in 2001 we are struggling to rebuild some of our most historically abundant stocks. Our current fisheries policy is the result of a slow and awkward transition from promotion to

regulation, (and too often recovery and rebuilding). The National Marine Fisheries Service is now one of the most regulatory agencies in the US government and, in many ways, is tasked with undoing the results of their original mandate.

Considering the fundamental conflicts inherent in the history of NMFS, it is no surprise that their evolution into their current role has been driven by the need to respond to one crisis after another. Crisis management is rarely associated with success and progress, and one of the greatest casualties of this history is the stigma that is now associated with federal fisheries management. There is currently a critical lack of trust in the process at every level, from the fishermen at one end to Congress at the other. The commission will need to make a critical assessment of the current council-based management structure and determine how it can be made to work more effectively. In doing so, this commission must make the case that the goal of sustainable well-managed fisheries is possible, necessary, and merits making the investment in both ideas and money needed to bring our management in line with the current needs of our fisheries. There is a clear reluctance to make these investments because of past failures.

Allow me to give you one recent example:

The necessity to increase stock assessments has long been a priority of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). This year the Administration's request included \$15 million for stock assessments, which would only fund 1/3 of the needed chartered ship days identified in the NMFS data acquisition plan. When this already inadequate request came to Congress it was cut by 87% and reduced to \$2 million.

The appropriators in Congress simply lack the confidence that NMFS can do the job and are reluctant to provide significant funding increases. This, in turn, creates a reluctance in authorizing committees to consider significant new management ideas for fear of giving NMFS new mandates that won't be funded. It is important that we break this cycle so that we begin to utilize some of the many forward-thinking ideas that could have a significant impact on the way we manage our fisheries.

Promising management and research programs that have suffered from this lack of confidence include:

- **Capacity reduction** - Overcapacity is perhaps the single most greatest impediment to sustainable fisheries management. Reducing capacity will require a real commitment from Congress to fund buy-backs of permits and vessels and provide assistance to displaced fishermen.
- **Cooperative research** - There is currently a serious gulf between fishermen, scientists and managers, that has created an atmosphere of mistrust and animosity. By involving fishermen in the design, implementation, and interpretation of fisheries research, cooperative research programs are a cost effective way to improve the level of scientific understanding while increasing the communication and trust between the Federal Government and its various constituencies.
- **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** - When established with the input and participation of all constituencies, MPAs can be an effective management tool. The current MPA program is a start to

what, with a greater commitment from Congress and the Administration, could be a very constructive federal role in providing data and coordination to regional MPA efforts.

- **Ecosystem based Management** - The effectiveness of fisheries management could be greatly enhanced with a clearer understanding of the relationship between managed stocks and the ecosystems within which they exist. Incorporating an ecosystem perspective into existing management plans, however, will require additional resources to conduct the research and update management plans.

There are many other smart management ideas out there, and clearly this commission is not going to work out all the difficult details of implementing these initiatives, but it can play an important role in helping to give an objective assessment of what federal management programs could potentially achieve using these tools and give a realistic estimate of how much we need to invest to effectively manage our fisheries. This is a critical step to giving appropriators and legislators the confidence to invest in the management of our marine fisheries.

Ocean Observing Systems

Next, I would like to stress the importance of creating a nationwide coastal ocean observing system, and mention some of the challenges that we face in bringing this concept into reality.

Although coastal areas comprise only 10 percent of the U.S. land area, they are home to half the nation's population. By the year 2010 our coastal population is expected to increase by another 60 percent. Coastal resources are under tremendous pressure from pollution and increased utilization. Long-term, continuous, and real-time observations of our coastal ocean environments are a key component in helping us to understand, manage and better protect our coastal resources. A nationwide coastal ocean observing system will benefit a diverse array of user groups, including transportation, commercial fishing, recreation and tourism.

For example, coastal observations will enable safe and efficient voyage planning and entry to the ports. A recent study on the economic benefits for the Gulf of Maine Ocean Observing System predicted that an improvement of only 1% in transit time for ships traversing the Gulf of Maine would yield benefits of over \$500,000 per year. A similar 1% improvement in search and rescue effectiveness in the Gulf of Maine resulting from more accurate current measurements could save an additional 6 lives per year.

Ocean technologies and science have advanced to the point that many of the necessary ocean observations are now technically possible, and many elements of a national ocean observing system are already in place. Our challenge is to integrate new and existing ocean observing systems into a national system. We will also need to determine the most suitable managing framework for all of the Federal agencies that will be involved in managing and funding a national ocean observing system. The National Oceans Commission can play an important role in assessing the most efficient way to create this framework.

Ocean Exploration

Ocean exploration has also been a topic of much recent interest within the ocean research community.

There are so many compelling reasons to explore and increase our understanding of the oceans that I can't begin to mention them, and considering the recent excellent work done the President's Panel on Ocean Exploration, I couldn't hope to articulate a clearer vision and reasoning for a national exploration initiative.

I am encouraged that Congress and the Administration have given this idea an initial vote of confidence by creating and funding the office of ocean exploration within NOAA. This is an good first step, but it is important to remember that this new office only addresses a small part of the Panel's recommendations. I hope that you will continue to remind us in Congress that this program has enormous potential to grow into something that more closely resembles the vision of the panel.

Education and Outreach

Finally let me just say a few words about education and outreach, because I don't think you can overemphasize their importance.

One of the great ironies we face in advocating for the oceans is that we have not captured the attention of the public. Considering the extraordinary response to educational programs like JASON and the Sustainable Seas Expedition, as well as the public interest in our sanctuaries and estuaries, it is clear that NOAA has the potential to capture public attention as well as NASA, we just haven't done a good enough job of making that connection.

I believe that no investment in outreach is wasted. When the public gets excited about the oceans, their management and protection become higher national priorities and if you can do that everything else will follow.

I would once again like to thank the commission and express my high hopes that this process will result in significant progress toward a more effective national ocean policy.