

U.S. COMMISSION ON
OCEAN POLICY



Oral Statement
By
Admiral James D. Watkins, U.S. Navy (Retired)
Chairman
U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
Before
The United States Senate
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Room 253 Senate Russell Building
September 21, 2004
Washington, D.C.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before you today to present the final report of the Commission on Ocean Policy: *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century*, as required by the Oceans Act of 2000.

The Final Report, and its many appendices, reflects three years of hard work, extensive outreach and comprehensive review by a broad spectrum of ocean and coastal stakeholders. And, as we highlighted in our Mid-term and Preliminary Reports, the one issue common to virtually every stakeholder is an overwhelming and growing concern for the welfare of our nation's oceans and coasts.

The oceans are in trouble. Most importantly, the current management regime and the science supporting it are inadequate to address the growing suite of complex and interrelated problems facing those economically, ecologically and aesthetically valuable ocean resources. These concerns, voiced by the public and government officials alike, represent a mandate for change. While the Final Report contains over 200 recommendations, the overriding message is this: we need to act now to reverse distressing declines if this and future generations are to continue enjoying the many benefits we derive from our oceans and coasts.

Before I discuss our major findings and recommendations, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the enormous contributions of Senator Fritz Hollings.

Senator Hollings, on behalf of the members of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, I would like to extend our sincere appreciation for your tireless work on behalf of our nation's oceans and coasts over your 38-year career in the United States Senate. From your role carrying the mantle of the Stratton Commission recommendations forward, to your support for the establishment and work of this Commission, you have been a leader in ocean issues. For your continuing

dedication to oceans and coasts, the nation, and this Commission, owes you a debt of gratitude. All in the ocean community will sorely miss your presence in the Senate. Your ocean legacy, and the collective commitment and vision of the members of this Committee in putting into motion a process for change through the establishment of this Ocean Commission, will be the positive and lasting impact on our oceans and coasts for generations that this new blueprint for the 21st Century should spawn.

Mr. Chairman, let me continue. The Final Report provides 212 action-oriented recommendations that present balanced and workable solutions for some of the most pressing problems facing our oceans and coasts.

While I would like to discuss these recommendations in some detail, given the limited time available this morning, I will focus most of my statement on changes between the Preliminary and the Final Report. First, I would like to point out that the major thrust of the Preliminary Report remains unchanged. Recognition of the interrelationships among physical, biological, chemical and geological processes in the dynamic marine environment, and the increasing influence of human activities upon these processes, is pushing this nation inexorably toward an ecosystem-based management approach. We are facing a new generation of environmental problems, such as nonpoint source pollution, that require better data, more coordinated and integrated management strategies, and changes in human behaviors. To do the job, we must reshape our governance structures, revitalize ocean and coastal science, exploration and technology, and transform the American stewardship ethic.

Mr. Chairman, numerous changes and clarifications were made throughout the report in response to the comments of 37 Governors, 5 tribal leaders and 800 additional stakeholders and I have included a summary of these changes as part of my formal written statement.

Interestingly, after careful review, it became clear that most of these comments served to further reinforce key concerns and recommendations contained in the Preliminary Report. This is a very positive signal, showing that Governors, industries, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions and ordinary citizens, are ready for change. They understand that business as usual is unacceptable and that we need to dedicate additional resources to support science and exploration and refashion our governance systems to broaden and strengthen the partnerships that will be the backbone of a new ecosystem-based approach.

Perhaps the most important change in the Final Report is our effort to emphasize and clarify the important role of the States, including the Great Lakes States, in the new process. While the report carries a strong focus on changes needed at the Federal level, which was our mandate, this was interpreted by some as promoting a "top-down-only" approach. Such was never the Commission's intent. We favor a balanced approach, of shared responsibility, not only with the States, but also with the numerous nongovernmental organizations that play an important role in ocean and coastal management. By focusing on State and local needs, we saw our mandate as recommending changes in the Federal system that will facilitate the collective development of a national ocean policy while lessening bureaucratic roadblocks.

These changes would require increased Federal resources, expertise, and assistance to States and other entities, as well as more coherent policies across sectors such as agriculture, coastal zone management, and marine transportation. We also refined our discussion of regional councils, increased our emphasis on watershed management, and recognized the need for flexibility in the implementation of observing and monitoring systems.

Another significant addition to the Final Report is a consolidated and expanded discussion and analysis of the costs involved in implementing the Commission's recommendations. A new Appendix G provides detailed cost estimates for each recommendation in the report, with a Summary Table presented in Chapter 30. I need to be clear that these estimates are intended as guidelines, and should not be interpreted as authoritative calculations of the funding needs for individual programs. Based on our analysis, the total cost to implement a new ocean policy starts at \$1.5 billion the first year, and rises to \$3.9 billion in the outyears. These funding levels represent a modest investment to protect what is arguably one of the nation's greatest economic, as well as natural, resources.

We also responded to external comments by emphasizing the role of the oceans in climate change. We highlight the ocean's dominant role in the cycling of water, heat, and carbon on the planet with profound, but poorly understood impacts on global climate change, human health, biodiversity, natural hazards, ice cover, corals, fisheries, and transportation.

Although, there are other changes I could mention, let me get to the main point. The urgent need for action is clear. It is equally clear that, by rising to the challenge today and addressing the many activities that are affecting our continent at its edges, our nation can protect the ocean environment, create jobs, increase revenues, enhance security, expand trade, and ensure ample supplies of energy, minerals, food, and life-saving drugs.

Rising to this challenge requires leadership from the President – and we passed that message along to the White House yesterday – and from this institution. It has been particularly heartening to see Congress exercise its key role through the introduction of numerous ocean and coastal related bills over the past year. The leadership demonstrated by the senior members of this committee – Senators Hollings, Stevens, Inouye and Gregg – with their sponsorship of the National Ocean Policy and Leadership Act (S.2647) and the Ocean Research Coordination and Advancement Act (S.2648), sends a very strong signal that the time is ripe for a change in how we manage our oceans and coasts. These bills, as well as others introduced in both the House and Senate, begin to address difficult organizational, scientific, technical, educational, and funding issues that are at the heart of the problem and offer valid approaches that merit discussion and contribute significantly to the public dialogue.

Mr. Chairman, it has taken more than 35 years for the nation to refocus its attention on our vital ocean and coastal resources. Our report represents endless hours of hard work and the contributions of many. But, it pales in comparison to what needs to happen now. We are, after all, a temporary independent Commission, charged with providing our most thoughtful recommendations. That we have done through our Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century. It is the permanent decision-making institutions in this town that have the authority, if they choose to exercise it, to translate our recommendations – or at least the best of them – into law and policy.

This will require great political will, new fiscal investment, and strong public support. But, in the long run, all Americans will benefit.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify this morning, Mr. Chairman, and I would be happy to address any questions that the members of this Committee may have.