



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

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Donald L. Carcieri
Governor

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Admiral James D. Watkins USN (Ret.)
Chairman
U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
1120 20th Street, NW
Suite 200 North
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Admiral Watkins:

I am writing in regard to the upcoming draft report by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy that will soon be released to Governors. I look forward to the opportunity to review it.

As both a coastal state and a state that is centered around Narragansett Bay and its valuable resources, issues that affect ocean resources, uses and values are vital to Rhode Islanders. We live and work in a critical land/water estuarine ecosystem, designated by Congress as an estuary of national significance. Narragansett Bay and coastal areas also support a main economic engine for the region. Our bay and coastal resources support commercial fisheries, transportation, marine research, technology development and education, boat-building, marine recreation and tourism, and aquaculture and account for thousands of jobs throughout the region. As home to the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography, Narragansett Bay and the R.I. coast host dozens of significant research projects that aim to increase our understanding of coastal and ocean systems. The U.S. Navy maintains both military and research facilities here, providing a strategic presence and key research results that support national security.

Recognizing the importance of better coordination of programs that work on coastal, ocean and watershed issues and of increasing the effectiveness of current efforts, I created a Governor's Narragansett Bay and Watershed Planning Commission in November 2003. The stakeholder-based Commission is charged with taking action on a series of short- and long-term goals for the bay and our coastal areas. Although Rhode Island continues to take steps to address coastal and ocean issues, a federal partnership with a comprehensive perspective is critical. Federal leadership in terms of policy and funding is essential.

In this regard, the Commission's recommendations could have a true positive impact in at least five areas of significant importance to Rhode Island, outlined below.

Support Watershed-Based Planning: We are taking steps to improve governance but have found few consistent federal resources that support watershed or ecosystem governance. The federal government could and should create an ongoing mechanism to support watershed planning and implementation of watershed plans.

Reform Fisheries Management: Rhode Island has seen declining populations of commercially important finfish. Because this goes beyond state waters and involves regional and national management structures, the federal government has a large role in how these fisheries are managed. There are complex issues involving both management (national, regional and local) and technology (harvesting, processing, etc.) that need to be addressed within the context of a comprehensive federal policy that will protect and sustain fisheries while supporting fishing industries.

Support Habitat Restoration: Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as major problems in estuaries and coastal areas around the U.S. Over the last several years, we have developed a coastal habitat restoration plan and have made progress in both implementing projects. The federal government should commit to stemming the loss of coastal habitat and provide sufficient funding so that, in partnership with the states, we can make real progress in habitat protection and restoration.

Support Environmental Monitoring: Actual environmental monitoring data that can identify status and trends is very limited due to costs and resources; it currently cannot provide a real picture of the status of the bay and its resources and therefore hampers our ability to accurately assess the effectiveness of our management actions. Dedicated federal support for coastal and watershed monitoring would help us inform the public and would allow us to better tailor management actions that solve problems.

Nutrient Pollution Abatement: Nutrient pollution has been identified as a national problem for some time but it was truly brought home to us this past August when we experienced a major fish kill in Greenwich Bay. Funding and technical assistance is needed for accurate assessments of nonpoint pollution sources, better technologies to abate those sources, and promotion of the use of low impact development techniques.

We look forward to reviewing what we hope will be a strong report, with recommendations that will lend support to the policy and funding needs that must be met in order to achieve sound ocean management in Rhode Island, as well as other coastal states. I commend the Commissioners and their staff for their work and hope that a new national dialogue results from it.

Sincerely,



Donald L. Carcieri
Governor