

November 8, 2002

Admiral James D. Watkins, USN (Ret.)  
Chairman  
US Commission on Ocean Policy  
1120 20<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Admiral Watkins,

The Council on Ocean Law was very pleased that the Commission adopted a resolution on 14 November 2001 in support of US accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This is a crucial element of ocean governance and has been a fundamental goal of the Council for many years.

We would like to draw to your attention another issue of international ocean governance where the Commission could have a significant impact. This has to do with managing information to support timely, informed, and consistent US contributions to the more than forty international bodies with a role in ocean management in which the United States participates. Included are convention processes and intergovernmental organizations at global, regional, multilateral, and bilateral levels.

Within and among federal agencies, major improvements are required in the means to locate and draw on information needed to develop US positions in these bodies and to coordinate US support for oceans-related activities in other countries. Equally important, improved information and communications management could enhance dialogue with the Congress, state governments, non-governmental interests, and the media. It could also strengthen operational collaboration with trade and professional organizations, the scientific community, business and industry, environmental groups, labor, and other organized constituencies.

The numerous advantages of an up-to-date, well-organized information system on US international ocean interests are enumerated on the page attached. The number of international bodies active in the oceans domain makes this an ideal pilot project for a more systematic approach to information management for critical US foreign policy interests. It could pave the way toward similar approaches in fields ranging from international trade to human rights and the environment. The long-standing and relatively well-functioning interagency process on ocean affairs is a substantial building block for such an initiative.

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We would encourage the Commission to recommend a budget allocation to fund planning and design of such a system, based on user needs, and to endorse the establishment of appropriate technical arrangements.

Thank you for your consideration,

Christian A. Herter, Jr.  
Chairman, Board of Directors  
Council on Ocean Law

Cc: Mr. William D. Ruckelshaus

## A Modern Ocean Information System to Support US Participation in International Ocean Initiatives

There are numerous advantages of an up-to-date, well-organized information system on US international ocean interests, enumerated below. In addition to benefits for federal agencies and US participation in international fora, a relatively open system could enhance contributions by Congressional, state, and non-governmental interests. It would be particularly useful for new personnel. (Obviously, such a system would require a 'closed' or classified channel for certain secure communications among federal agencies.)

It is essential that the design of an information system to support US participation in international oceans-related bodies be well thought through. For any particular body, there are likely to be international meetings, legislative issues, scientific findings, technical innovations, diplomatic interactions, international assistance programs, and other developments that are relevant to the outcome. US representatives need to be aware of these linkages and in a position to take advantage of opportunities for political and public interaction. The growing number of international oceans-related initiatives makes it virtually impossible for any single individual or agency to stay on top of relevant developments and how one relates to another. An information system organized around (1) the schedule of upcoming intergovernmental meetings relevant to oceans and (2) ocean issues (e.g., fisheries, ship-source pollution, maritime boundaries, marine scientific research) could greatly facilitate this understanding.

Among the advantages of easy access to a well-organized information system on international ocean affairs would be:

- consistency in US positions across a range of intergovernmental bodies;
- better communication of US interests, domestically and internationally;
- identification of federal agency interests and mandates in each issue area and improved interagency communication and preparation for international meetings;
- access to the "institutional memory" of federal government agencies regarding each issue and its consideration at the international level, including issues in international litigation affecting the United States;
- identification of key states (US) and interest groups concerned with each issue;
- access to US interest group views and analyses relevant to each issue over time;
- access to Congressional views over time;
- access to key scientific, economic, legal, and other analyses relevant to each issue;
- access to key domestic and international press coverage of each issue over time;
- up-to-date information on key decision points in relevant international bodies, including elections for important posts and the potential for US candidates;
- improved understanding of budgets and results achieved by international bodies over time, as well as constraints affecting results achieved;
- identification of relevant international bodies and websites for each issue;
- identification of key foreign countries concerned with each issue, their interests, and relevant actions/statements on particular issues;
- identification of relevant, up-to-date US operational initiatives in other countries/regions;
- improved potential to design coherent US operational initiatives that respond to other nations' concerns and priorities and to collaborate with non-governmental partners in doing so;
- better understanding of what has worked and why in addressing particular types of oceans problems;
- better coordination of US-funded research relevant to international oceans concerns; and
- better budget planning within individual agencies and across the federal government as a whole, with the savings generated by a more coherent system likely to exceed the cost.