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Assuring Momentum for National Ocean Policy Reform

On behalf of The Cousteau Society, I want to applaud Chairman Watkins and the members and staff of The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy for their efforts to bring coherence to the chaos of the nation's maritime policies.

In addition to hearing from a broad range of witnesses across the nation, you have worked hard to gain a firm understanding of environmental and economic concerns, science and technology, and the growing conflict over preserving both jobs and marine resources. Above all, you have listened to those who care most about the oceans, and you share their hopes and aspirations for sustainable livelihoods and healthy seas and coasts.

Although this may not be the best of times to revamp U.S. ocean policy, we are reminded that national and international interests are often tied together. The Commission's concerns with regard to the Law of the Sea Treaty are well considered and noteworthy. At the same time, similar merits support ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity and U.S. support for the Convention on Climate Change.

As the Commission finalizes recommendations, it is important to consider the role of Congress as the fundamental governing mechanism driving national ocean policy. Since the demise of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, the House of Representatives has lacked a focal point for resolving conflicting ocean policy measures. Although a number of Committees maintain jurisdiction over marine issues, both the House and Senate continue to have difficulty integrating the various aspects of ocean law and policy and mediating conflicting interests.

If we are truly to set the stage for revamping national ocean policy, we must turn to Congress and look at how better to integrate these interests within the legislative framework. Two options deserve further consideration: a joint House-Senate Oceans Committee (similar to the Joint Economic Committee) and a temporary or select Committee on Ocean Affairs established to

evaluate and implement the recommendations from both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission.

Depending on how these mechanisms are established, they could combine legislative and oversight responsibilities. To succeed, they would need to include strong leadership, as well as key majority and minority members from legislative and appropriations Committees with jurisdiction over ocean issues. They would also need to assure broad participation by members representing coastal districts, interest groups, businesses, and citizens concerned about the future of the sea.

We are not asking to remake Congress or tinker with the fundamental nature of the legislative process. Rather, we urge the Commission, to call on Congress to provide a forum for debate and resolution of conflicts inherent in both the present and future ocean policy debate. By looking at how we govern, we are most likely to find what drives national and international ocean policy concerns.