

Statement of Dennis M. Allen, Ph.D.

Director, Baruch Marine Field Laboratory, University of South Carolina
President, Estuarine Research Federation

**Comments presented to the Commission on Ocean Policy
at the Southeast Regional Meeting, Charleston, SC January 16, 2002**

On behalf of the Estuarine Research Foundation

Good afternoon Admiral Watkins, Dr. Kitsos, and members of the Commission. My name is Dennis M. Allen. I am a faculty member in the Baruch Institute and Marine Science Program at the University of South Carolina.

I am the current President of the Estuarine Research Federation, and I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today on our organization's behalf.

The Federation, which is also known as ERF, is an organization composed of about 1500 scientists, managers, and educators committed to the acquisition and application of sound scientific knowledge to the sustained well being of estuarine and coastal systems.

We would like to identify three primary matters that we hope you will consider in developing recommendations for a coordinated and comprehensive national ocean policy. We recognize that you have already heard references to these issues today, and that you will likely hear them at future regional meetings. By reintroducing them here, we hope to reinforce and elevate your awareness of their importance to the estuarine community at both the southeast regional and national levels.

First, we encourage a broad- or ecosystem-based approach to setting policy for coastal systems.

Many of the fundamental environmental problems associated with coastal systems, including nutrient overenrichment, eutrophication, reductions in freshwater inflow, and pollution by contaminants, occur over large spatial scales.

All too often, coastal watersheds, rivers, estuaries, and the ocean are treated as discrete units rather than as inter-related elements along a continuum that extends from the land to the sea. Our fisheries and other living resources rely on suitable conditions throughout the continuum. Jurisdictions of management agencies generally fall short of ecologically meaningful boundaries. Geographical and political boundaries often restrict action to only a few of the many physical, chemical, biological, and societal parts of the whole.

There are many good examples of local, state, regional programs (for example, in the Chesapeake Bay and Florida) that have been successful in considering the “big picture”. This needs to be more prominent in federal coastal and ocean policy actions.

We urge you to consider changes that require agencies and programs to take more holistic views of the coast. Broader mandates and stronger inter-agency coordination are keys to success.

Second, we encourage the expansion of both the scope and completeness of scientific information bases.

Funding to conduct research and provide the infrastructure to support it is not sufficient to meet today’s challenges. There are many needs, but we are especially sensitive to the need for more resources to investigate complex issues such as the cumulative impacts of subtle changes associated with increased human activities.

Increased support for long-term monitoring programs and observing systems is critical to our understanding of natural and human-induced changes and their consequences for coastal systems. Coupled with process-oriented research, long-term studies enable better ecological forecasting capabilities.

Neither the rate of acquisition of new scientific knowledge nor the application of new information is keeping up with our need to sustain and restore the health of our coasts. We hope that you will find ways to increase support for both scientific research and infrastructure.

Thirdly, we encourage you to improve access to and the use of existing scientific information for decision making.

A large body of excellent, pertinent, peer-reviewed literature exists, but it is often unknown, unavailable, or underutilized by the nation’s management community.

We recognize this as a missed opportunity. We need to put existing information to work. One positive step would be to establish a program that reviews, synthesizes, and translates the scientific literature for use in coastal decision making. Such an endeavor would require a cross-section of professionals, and we believe that ERF and other scientific societies can play an important role in accomplishing this task.

We suspect such an effort would reveal information that would lead to the revision of many policy standards. It would also likely identify information gaps and suggest new research to support the informed management of coastal resources and ecosystems.

The Estuarine Research Federation stands ready to assist the Commission in its mission. At future regional meetings, our members will speak to issues such as wetlands protection, habitat restoration, eutrophication, aquaculture, introduced organisms, and

hydromanipulation. ERF will be working with other scientific organizations to develop additional recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input, and we would be happy to address any questions you may have about our statement or organization. We look forward to working with the Commission members and staff, and offer you best wishes in your important endeavor.