

January 14, 2002

Admiral James D. Watkins, Chairman
Commission on Ocean Policy
1120 20th Street, N.W.
Suite 200 North
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Admiral Watkins:

Thank you for the invitation to North Carolina Governor Mike Easley to speak to the Commission in Charleston. As you know, he is not able to attend but wanted me to convey how important he believes the Commission's mission is to both North Carolina and the nation. Please accept this letter as our statement for the record on issues of concern to the State of North Carolina.

North Carolina has a long history of interest in both the development of appropriate ocean policy and management of our coastal resources. North Carolina adopted its coastal management regime in 1974 pursuant to the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act just two years after passage of the federal law. In 1984, this State published "North Carolina and the Sea: An Ocean Policy Analysis." This report was the first in a long line of ocean policy reports produced by maritime states around the country. The North Carolina report recognized a trend in the early 1980s toward a more independent and certainly less federally financed role in ocean and coastal management for states. In light of that trend, the report's authors felt that "it behooves the states to pursue their own independent analysis of their individual and collective policy relationships to ocean and coastal issues, not only for their own benefit but also to prepare their contributions for future federal-state dialogues."

Consequently, North Carolina embarked on a multi-year effort to identify its ocean resources and policy issues as well as to begin identifying options and actions. Some actions have occurred while others are awaiting the appropriate time and circumstances for these issues to be adequately addressed.

In 1993, the State held a conference called "Managing the Coastal Ocean for the 21st Century: North Carolina's Role" and published proceedings in 1994. This conference focused on living and non-living resources, use conflicts, multiple use management and economics of ocean resource management. In 1994, our department produced "North Carolina's Ocean Stewardship Area: A Management Study" in conjunction with the North Carolina Sea Grant College Program. This study focused on six areas: (1) the extraction of solid minerals from the seabed; (2) oil and gas exploration and exploitation; (3) marine fisheries management; (4) the discharge of pollutants into the marine environment from ocean outfalls, ocean dumping and littering; (5) recreational uses of the marine environment; and (6) marine protected areas, including archaeological sites and ecological preserves. And in 1995, our department published "Management and Stewardship of North Carolina's Coastal Ocean: Recommendations of the N.C. Ocean Task Force." The task force recommendations focused on the six areas identified in the 1994 management study. These are the most current policy reviews undertaken by the State. A copy of each of these reports will be sent separately to the Commission's executive director, Dr. Tom Kitsos.

Since the time of those analyses and recommendations in the mid 1990's, some additional issues have emerged regarding management and policies affecting North Carolina's coastal and ocean resources. A number of severe hurricanes have caused significant damage. Consequently, this State is very interested in reducing the risk to property from coastal storms and erosion. A specific reaction from some of our coastal local governments is an increase in beach nourishment activities. Another issue is the proliferation of fiber optic cable and the potential for submerged cable routes impacting the bottoms of our sounds and territorial sea. Another issue that we consider essential is the reauthorization of the Coastal Zone Management Act. This reauthorization is overdue and should occur immediately without amendments that would weaken the federal-state financial partnership or the federal consistency provisions.

Ocean fisheries are of great social and economic importance to North Carolina. Our commercial and recreational fisheries generate millions of dollars of income and significant recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. These fisheries are in many cases jointly managed by the states, federal government, regional and interstate councils and commissions. We have a great interest in the way the federal government carries out its fisheries conservation and management responsibilities and are committed to all programs that will strengthen the state-federal partnership. To the extent possible, fisheries management should be carried out through the states since state programs are more expedient and flexible than federal regulatory procedures.

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The federal government's responsibilities in the Endangered Species Act are becoming increasingly prevalent in managing all uses of the coastal environment. While we strongly support the recovery and management of these important resources, we feel that much could be done to improve the State's understanding of the goals of the programs and to elevate the State's role in setting the standards for specific management needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to present North Carolina's issues of concern. We will continue to work with the Coastal States Organization as well the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to assist your efforts in any way that we can. We are excited about the formation of the Ocean Policy Commission and anticipate that the Commission will play a critical role in addressing ocean policy issues. To that end, we pledge to provide our assistance and insights in meeting your goals and objectives.

Sincerely,

William G. Ross Jr.