



## IN SUMMARY: RT3

### NOAA's Role in Executing a National Ocean Policy

**O**N MARCH 10, NOAA Ocean Service (NOS) Assistant Administrator Dr. Richard Spinrad hosted a constituent roundtable on NOAA's role in executing a national ocean strategy. The 18 constituents in attendance represented recreational and commercial fishing interests, the maritime sector, industry and consulting organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and the academic and scientific communities. A number of senior NOAA officials also participated in the discussions, including Mary Glackin (Assistant Administrator, Office of Program Planning and Integration), Louisa Koch (Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research), Rebecca Lent (Deputy Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service) and Charlie Challstrom (Commerce and Transportation Goal Team lead). Several NOS officials also attended, including Captain Craig McLean, Tom Kitsos and David Zilkoski. The roundtable provided an important opportunity to talk about NOAA's role in executing President Bush's *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, as well as other topics of interest.

#### OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Spinrad opened the meeting by discussing the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* and the new Cabinet-level Committee on Ocean Policy (COP), which met for the first time on April 5. U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez represented NOAA at this meeting. Dr. Spinrad noted that NOAA officials were also taking a leading role in each of the subgroups working under the COP. First, the agency is represented by NOAA Administrator VADM Conrad C. Lautenbacher Jr., USN (Ret.) on the Interagency Committee on Ocean Science and Resource Management Integration, or the Aqua Box. Further, NOAA is the only agency to have co-chair representation on each of the Aqua Box subcommittees, the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST) and the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR). Dr. Spinrad commented on the work of the JSOST, which he co-chairs, and discussed efforts to develop an ocean research priority plan by December 2006.

Mary Glackin discussed the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR), which she co-chairs. The SIMOR has completed its Statement of Purpose and priorities document, which the COP cleared at its April 5 meeting. SIMOR is in the process of further developing its work plan, which will focus on four priority areas: supporting regional and local collaboration (e.g., Gulf of Mexico Partnerships); working with the JSOST to better facilitate the use of ocean science and technology in ocean resource management; enhancing ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resource management and improving their use and conservation; and working with the JSOST to enhance ocean education. Rebecca Lent also talked about her role as the NOAA representative to SIMOR, and discussed the importance of bringing constituents' views into the process.

Dr. Spinrad discussed NOAA's role in promoting the Global Earth Observing System of Systems (GEOSS) and his work on tsunami issues as head of the U.S. Delegation to the International Oceanographic Commission. He also commented on current legislative initiatives in the 109th Congress and NOAA's priorities in the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, including the emerging Gulf of Mexico Alliance and connecting ocean observation activities to key regional management issues.



## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Dr. Spinrad opened the roundtable discussions by asking the participants to comment on the U.S. Ocean Action Plan. He also asked the constituents to discuss their priorities for implementation, and to describe related activities within their organizations. As noted below, the roundtable focused on a number of important issues related to the nation's ocean agenda.

### *Executing a National Ocean Policy*

Although a number of participants said they were pleased to see increased attention to ocean issues following the release of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, they also said they were disappointed by the fact that little information has been made available about the activities of the Committee on Ocean Policy. Nearly all of the participants called for greater transparency and stakeholder involvement with the Committee's work. They were eager to learn more about the Administration's efforts to execute the U.S. Ocean Action Plan and wanted to know how constituent groups could become involved with the Committee.

Several constituents believed that the momentum created by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Ocean Commission is being lost. They expressed concern that the nation won't have a comprehensive and integrated ocean agenda when the Committee on Ocean Policy develops its action plan in approximately 18 months. They noted that substantial political and financial support would be needed to implement the recommendations coming out of the Committee, and questioned whether the political will would exist to enact the recommendations—especially with other national priorities competing for the attention of policymakers. They said that the ocean community has political support now that it may not have in the future if it waits to act.

Several participants urged Congress and the Administration to work together to articulate a national ocean policy that provides a clear vision as to why the oceans are important to the country. They said ocean policy should be implemented in a comprehensive manner and coordinated with other priorities, including energy policy and national security concerns. They also urged NOAA to do a better job in identifying the linkages between national security concerns and ocean science and technology.

Several speakers commented on the need for a NOAA Organic Act that highlights the agency's core missions and strategic goals, such as NOAA's role in supporting safe navigation and maritime commerce. Two participants said that the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* focused too much on policy concerns, rather than on action-oriented results. They emphasized the need for tangible outcomes and economic studies that demonstrate the value of ocean activities. They also highlighted the fact that good stewardship is good business, and recommended measures that build human capacity rather than just responding to crises.

### *Ecosystem Management*

Several participants said that ecosystem management is an important tool for resource managers, and supported NOAA's efforts in this area. At the same time, they expressed concern that the States had limited resources to collect data and conduct marine assessments, and challenged NOAA to do a better job in supporting regional activities and involving state officials in the budget process.

Participants also discussed coastal watershed issues and commented on the need for better coordination between the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) and the Clean Water Act (CWA). Noting that beach replenishment activities were contributing to coastal development in some areas, one participant urged a more systemic approach to coastal

planning, along with federal and local oversight of state permitting decisions. Participants agreed that key watershed problems are not being addressed in many regions despite a number of federal and state programs addressing coastal concerns.

Several participants talked about increased pressures on coastal resources resulting from demographic trends and economic development, and their impacts on recreational and commercial fisheries. They also noted the importance of fishery stock assessments and called for better coordination between coastal planning and fisheries management officials.

### ***Promoting Public Awareness***

Many of the speakers called on the ocean community to work together to promote public awareness of ocean issues through enhanced education and outreach activities. They also urged NOAA to work more closely with the scientific and academic communities to raise public awareness of ocean issues, and agreed that public support would be needed to implement a national ocean policy and build support for NOAA's programs.

Several speakers urged NOAA to do a better job of addressing socioeconomic issues and communicating how the agency's activities benefit the economy. Several participants highlighted the role the private sector could play in bringing people together and solving problems related to ocean issues. They also said that NOAA needs to do a better job in presenting information about these issues to local communities.

### ***Promoting Ocean Science and Technology***

Several speakers commented favorably on NOAA's recently released research plan and urged the agency to work more closely with professional societies to sponsor constituent meetings and information sessions at key science and association meetings. Participants recommended introducing students to ocean technology at an early age, and discussed the possibility of building a coalition to promote this. Several constituents commented on the need to work together to build Congressional support for ocean science activities. One speaker noted that the Navy's support for civilian ocean science has been shrinking, and urged the ocean community to develop an effective mechanism to communicate the link between marine science and national security to key policymakers.

Several participants commented on industry's role in supporting the development of ocean observing systems and providing information for integrated resource management. Although they were pleased that Ocean.US recently held a forum for industry representatives, they said NOAA must do a better job in connecting with the business community on this issue. Noting that regional associations vary widely with regard to efforts to involve industry, another participant stressed the need for greater consistency along with standards for certification for regional associations.

### ***Marine Transportation System Issues***

Several stakeholders commented on marine transportation system (MTS) issues and said that maritime commerce and safety should be identified as a core mission in any NOAA Organic Act proposals. Although the participants were pleased to see that the U.S. Ocean Action Plan elevated the role of the interagency MTS Committee, they said that NOAA should identify a high-level advocate to assure that these goals are not lost.

Several participants also discussed the projected increase in inland and coastwise shipping and urged the Department of Commerce to promote the modernization of commercial vessels to enhance economic efficiency and assure environmental protection. Several speakers urged NOAA to continue to produce and maintain high-quality navigational charts, which are also essential to the protection of marine resources.

### ***Recreational and Commercial Fisheries***

The roundtable participants also perceived threats to the fishing industry. One speaker stressed the fact that the fishery management system was working at the national and regional levels and shouldn't be "torn apart." He commented on the fact that the industry is already subject to myriad laws, and that proposals to change the current system were leading to a sense of defensiveness in the community.

Participants also discussed aquaculture, noting the diverse views on this issue. Although many fishermen view it as a threat, some seafood companies see it as an opportunity to generate new wealth and would support efforts to set aside areas for aquaculture development. One participant noted that support for aquaculture projects varied among the states and urged the federal government to take a regional approach to aquaculture issues.

### ***NOAA's Role in Encouraging Stakeholder Involvement***

Many of the roundtable participants applauded NOAA for providing a timely forum to discuss key ocean policy issues with diverse constituent groups. They also urged the agency to hold constituent forums at upcoming academic and scientific meetings. There was also a well-received suggestion to hold roundtables focusing on industry concerns.

The participants also discussed the roles that other parts of NOAA play in working with the academic and research communities, and recommended building on the Sea Grant model to identify research and education priorities and engage NOAA's stakeholders. To do this properly, they said, requires ongoing input from stakeholder groups and sustained constituent outreach activities by NOAA officials. Several participants noted that this would be particularly important in building support for regional observation systems.

Several speakers noted that NOAA has an extensive regional presence throughout the country, and they urged the agency to take advantage of this network to reach out to a broader set of constituents. Participants were also supportive of NOAA's efforts to improve the integration of program activities, including matrix management efforts.