

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LISA A. MURKOWSKI

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES,
WILDLIFE, OCEANS AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING ON “ALASKA’S SOVEREIGNTY IN PERIL:
THE NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY’S GOAL TO FEDERALIZE ALASKA”

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I would like to thank my good friend, Congressman Young, for calling this oversight field hearing on the National Ocean Policy and allowing me to join you on the panel. I appreciate the opportunity to be here in Alaska to dive into some of the anticipated affects of the nine National Ocean Policy initiatives, including Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning (or CMSP). You know as a member of the Senate Appropriations CJS Subcommittee, I worked to defund FY 2012 spending for CMSP, and I was pleased to see that the President’s budget request left that budget line item at zero for FY 2013. Congressman Young, despite the message Congress sent in pulling funds for CMSP, I see many indications that the administration continues to move forward will all aspects of NOP.

In January, The National Ocean Council released a draft National Ocean Policy (NOP) implementation plan identifying an exhaustive list of milestones, many for 2012-2014 completion. Some of these milestones are pretty ambitious. For example, within the Ecosystem-based Management policy objective, there are 20 milestones. One of them is to develop national guidelines and best practices for

EBM implementation based on engagement of non-Federal partners and stakeholders. Another is to establish a process for adaptive resource management.

I support ecosystem-oriented decision making, and commend resource management bodies in the Alaska region like the North Pacific Fishery Management Council for proactively developing and integrating ecosystem-oriented management approaches into their decision making process. However, I do not support the concept of issuing national guidelines dictating standards for EBM, these one-size-fits all standards rarely work for Alaska

These two milestones alone, both targeted for 2013, would require tremendous coordination and would be very costly. And I have to ask to what end? We need more science and baseline information in order to effectively incorporate ecosystem based management in decision making – ironically, arbitrary milestones in the draft NOP implementation plan will drain resources from foundational science and core federal programs. EBM is just one of nine priority policy objectives, each with action items and milestones in the draft NOP implementation plan.

NOP will be expensive, and there are no dedicated funds for agencies to follow through with commitments identified in the draft implementation plan. In budget hearings in Washington, we've been hearing from agencies that the administration's NOP initiatives will be absorbed by existing programs, yet agencies have not provided us any indication of what work will need to be set aside as a tradeoff.

I'd like to return to CMSP for a minute. The President's Budget calls for expanding the Regional Ocean Partnership grants by \$0.5 million. Regional Ocean

Partnerships have formed in regions of the country where they feel there's a need for some coordination above and beyond what existing management bodies can provide on their own. Regional Ocean Partnerships were a way for those regions to continue to move forward with that type of work without imposing CMSP and the associated Regional Planning Bodies on everyone right now. I was disappointed to learn that this year, Regional Ocean Partnership competitive grants support activities that contribute to achieving the priorities identified by Regional Ocean Partnerships while also advancing NOP priorities including the national CMSP Framework. This is an unacceptable end run around Congress to implement CMPS. This program is clearly being used to advance the administration's CMSP initiative. Eligibility standards for ROPs under the grant program require only that applicants be a government, institution of higher learning, or non-profit or for-profit organization that may receive and expend federal funds. Yet, the administration's definition of CMSP includes identifying areas most suitable for various types or classes of activities.

There is no guarantee Regional Ocean Partnerships are the appropriate body to be making recommendations or dictating what can and cannot happen in waters off Alaska or along the Alaska coastline, and they certainly would not have the authority.

Congressman Young, these are just a few of my concerns about NOP, and I look forward to learning more through the testimony we receive today about Alaskan's concerns over NOP and CMSP, and how the organizations represented here today think the NOP priority initiatives will affect them.