Testimony Before The
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans
By
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Chairman Gilchrest, Ranking Member Pallone, and Members of the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans of the House Resources Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning to speak in support of H. R. 4027.

My name is Jay Blaire and I appear on behalf of the University of Miami, where I serve as Associate Dean for Administration at the University's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science.

The Rosenstiel School which was founded sixty years ago, is among the top six institutions of its kind, and is in the forefront of environmental research, with particular focus on marine and atmospheric sciences with the goal of improving our understanding of the environment for the benefit of society. The School has a population of over 550 people including 112 faculty and 180 graduate students. The majority of our graduate students pursue the PhD, while others obtain MA, MS and joint JDMA degrees in partnership with the University of Miami's Law School. It's important to also note that approximately 70% of our graduate students are US citizens. In addition we teach 350 undergraduate students in a unique marine and atmospheric science program. The extraordinary quality of the School's faculty is exemplified by the fifty percent success rate on peer reviewed research proposals. This is significantly higher than the national average in the geo-sciences. The School has six academic divisions in the life, physical and social sciences, and enjoys a very healthy interdisciplinary research program organized in cross cutting research centers, and supported by state of the art research equipment and other facilities.

The Rosenstiel School operates on an annual budget of approximately $50 million. Of this amount approximately 80% represents scientific research conducted in support of federal priorities.

The School is part of the Miami Ocean Science Community, sharing the south end of Virginia Key, three miles east of Miami. In addition to the School the Community is home to two NOAA facilities: The Atlantic Oceanographic & Meteorological Laboratories (AOML) and The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). Taken together, this scientific Community comprises over 1,000 people, and has annual expenditure of approximately $100 million.

The NOAA Labs and the School have a long history of collaboration on many projects. A good example of this is The Cooperative Institute of Marine and Atmospheric Studies (CIMAS). CIMAS was established in 1977. In 1992 the National Marine Fisheries (NMFS) was formally included in CIMAS through the establishment of the Cooperative Unit for Fisheries Education and Research (CUFER). CIMAS enhances NOAA-University synergies and promotes both the quality and attractiveness of the local NOAA laboratories as a working environment. CIMAS increases the breadth of University involvement in problem areas that are important for the fulfillment of NOAA's mission. Research themes on which there is joint work include: Climate Variability, Air-Sea Interactions and Exchanges, Integrated Ocean Observations, Human Interactions with the Environment, Fisheries Dynamics, and Regional Coastal Ecosystem Processes. All of these topics are vital to NOAA's mission and the School is fortunate to be able to collaborate with our NOAA colleagues on these nationally significant projects.

Both the School and the NOAA Laboratories have critical needs to renew and expand space for laboratories and offices. Many of the buildings are inadequate to house modern research environments, and the annual maintenance cost of the aging buildings in a coastal environment are no longer cost effective.

We are therefore proposing to construct a new building to house a Univerisity of Miami / NOAA Marine Science Complex.

The creation of a new UMiami/NOAA Marine Science Complex will bring together expertise in environmental and fisheries research, assessment and management and facilitate the intellectual exchange of ideas and results. New innovative collaborations will be encouraged, particularly using state-of-the-art technology that would be available to all parties. In addition, because the Rosenstiel School has one of the nation's leading marine science graduate programs, an education program shaped to meet NOAA's workforce needs in the area of fisheries would result. The new facility will also offer a location to showcase for the public NOAA's and UM's research results and their benefits to the nation's citizens.

A newly established Marine Life Science Center will be at the core of the new facility. This Center will add to the strong, interdisciplinary expertise of the Rosenstiel School's internationally recognized faculty, improving the focus on the global issues of ocean conservation, oceans and human health, sustainable fisheries, coral ecology, and marine genomics. Using a multi-pronged approach, the Center will address and link fishery research and management options with environmental and socio-economic studies to provide innovative solutions to these major societal problems. Close partnership with the NOAA laboratories builds an end-to end capability (from basic science through to meaningful policy options) and allows a broader expertise, all at one location. The Marine Life Science Center is a natural focus for this facility. By bridging the diverse strengths of each institution (UM/RSMAS - interdisciplinary marine/atmospheric research and education; NOAA NMFS - fisheries management and assessment; NOAA AOML - oceanography and meteorology), federal and academic scientists can work even more closely together to provide effective, science-based management of our nation's marine resources, train graduate students in fields including fisheries science, assessment techniques, and policy, and increase the public's awareness of fisheries issues.

H.R. 4027 is a critical first step in reaching the goal to establish the new Center. The bill would authorize the Secretary of Commerce to permit the University of Miami to construct the new facility on land under NOAA’s jurisdiction. It is important to point out that this bill creates an option, but does not require the Secretary to grant a permit. Rather it would give the Secretary the authority to grant a permit if the Secretary finds that granting such a permit is in the interests of the government. When the Secretary has this authority and made a determination to proceed, the University and NOAA would engage in a joint planning process and enter into negotiations for the joint use of the new facility.

We believe that pursuing this course of action provides both the University and NOAA with an opportunity to meet its facilities needs in a cost effective and timely manner, as well as promote an even greater collaborative environment for all.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee. I would be pleased to answer any questions.