Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife & Oceans

fisheries - - Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6232 - - (202) 226-0200

Witness Statement

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Harbors, Navigation and the Environment Committee Before the House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans
SEPTEMBER 13, 2001

Good morning. I am Frank Hamons, Manager of Harbor Development at the Maryland Port Administration and Chairman of the American Association of Port Authorities' Harbors, Navigation and the Environment Committee. Founded in 1912, AAPA is an association of 160 public port authorities in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, the Association represents almost 300 sustaining and associate members, firms and individuals with an interest in the seaports of the Western Hemisphere. My testimony today reflects the views of AAPA's United States delegation.

AAPA port members are public entities, divisions or agents of State and local government mandated by law to serve public purposes. Public Port Authorities are charged with developing port facilities, facilitating waterborne commerce, and promoting economic development. Ports are key to this nation's ability to trade internationally, providing American consumers and businesses with the choices they demand for worldwide products and markets. Ports provide this connection to the world by handling 95 percent of all U.S. overseas trade by weight, and 75 percent by value.

The success of U.S. international trade depends on a viable and safe navigation system. Without modern navigational tools, the United States cannot move cargo that is important to the U.S. economy safely and efficiently through ports. In addition, with an increase in the number of larger, deep draft vessels, the United States cannot afford to compromise safety or threaten the environment. For all of these reasons, reauthorization of the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act must be a priority.

AAPA has consistently advocated for increased funding for navigation services, including mapping and charting, tides and currents and Physical Oceanographic and Real-Time Systems (PORTS) provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Providing adequate resources to maintain modern and accurate navigation services must be a national priority because these programs provide critical environmental protection and safety tools to all waterway users and enhance the efficiency of international trade. Safety systems such as PORTS that provide valuable navigation information should be provided for all U.S. ports and not simply to those that can afford it. Safety should not be a matter of choice but of necessity.

That is also the view of the Marine Navigation Safety Coalition, a coalition of over 40 industry groups representing various aspects of the nation's Marine Transportation System, including marine pilots, maritime exchanges, cargo and vessel owners, rail and terminal operators, and ports. The Coalition,

coordinated by AAPA, was formed four years ago to promote the importance of funding NOAA's navigation services programs as authorized under the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act.

Background

Today mariners transiting U.S. waters are forced, in many situations, to rely on out-dated navigation charts and tidal predictions produced by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). A large percentage of depths shown on NOAA charts are based on surveys that were conducted over 50 years ago. In fact, a number of deep draft ships that travel through U.S. waters are relying on charts with depths that were determined by the use of lead lines prior to World War II. Over the past ten years or more, NOAA has been forced to withdraw tide and current predictions for several major ports, including the Port of New York and New Jersey, due to insufficient and outdated information. The San Francisco chart also was withdrawn in 1991 and more are expected to be pulled, since 50 percent of them are based on observations over 50 years old.

Ships routinely pass within a few feet of the bottom when entering and transiting our nation's coastal and inland waterways. A single impediment such as an uncharted rock, an old concrete buoy block, or the fluke of an abandoned anchor has the potential to puncture the hull of a ship. The environmental damage from such an accident can be measured in billions of dollars.

Compounding these problems is the rapid growth of traffic on U.S. waters. Waterborne commerce has tripled since 1947. The U.S. Department of Transportation projects that it will triple again over the next three decades. The number of recreational boaters has nearly doubled since 1970, crowding already overflowing harbors.

Electronic Nautical Charts (ENC) are the new standard for safe navigation of vessels and are the base ingredient or visual backdrop for collision avoidance systems such as the Electronic Chart Display and Information System (ECDIS) and the United States Coast Guard's proposed Automated Identification System (AIS). These complementary systems are designed to prevent accidents and spills by alerting the mariner of a potential grounding in enough time for the mariner to take corrective action. Creating an ENC is not simply a matter of converting the paper chart data to an electronic format, since most of the chart data was collected using positioning methods that predate Global Positioning System. NOAA is recollecting position-critical data using geodesy and aerial imagery on critical chart features such as petroleum docks, ferry terminals and aids to navigation to enable mariners to safely navigate vessels in constricted waterways and in times of limited visibility. Unfortunately, despite the importance of integrating ENCs for use within the maritime industry, NOAA has not received the necessary funding over the years to bring them on line.

Another important navigational tool NOAA has developed is the Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS). With accurate, real-time information and modern forecasts, ships can safely adjust loads to use available draft margins. PORTS allows ships — berthed or under way — to access real-time data from a variety of instruments that measure currents, winds and waves, water levels (tides), depths, temperatures, and salinity. Despite the success of this program in enhancing safety and improving the efficiency of vessel movements and international trade, PORTS has only been available to a small number of commercial harbors. Those fortunate few are paying for its operation and maintenance and those wishing to install a new system must pay for this as well.

The data available from PORTS enables much more accurate tide and current predictions, thus reducing travel delays and increasing traffic-handling capabilities. Many of this country's export products are price-

sensitive commodities. Because shipping contracts can hinge on a few tenths of a cent per bushel of grain or ton of coal, transportation costs can be the deciding factor for foreign buyers choosing between American or foreign bulk products. Maximizing the use of channel depths is an important factor in the efficiency of waterborne commerce. PORTS systems are also instrumental in preventing and responding to spills of hazardous materials and oil, predicting coastal floods and conducting scientific research. The success of PORTS in Tampa Bay, Florida, New York-New Jersey, San Francisco, Houston and the Chesapeake Bay is fueling interest in the establishment and expansion of these systems at other harbors around the country.

Without PORTS, true depth, rise in tide and on-site wind and channel current information is not readily available. Furthermore, as trade and vessel operations increase, harbors that do not have this system will have trouble handling the increasing volume of traffic at the same level of safety as they do today. It has become clear that at a number of ports, the PORTS program is no longer an enhancement but a necessity for many groups, including but not limited to pilots, vessel operators, shippers, the U.S. Coast Guard and port authorities. With no other tool to accurately monitor these conditions, significant safety and environmental risks could result.

There is another important contribution that PORTS makes to safeguarding the coastal environment. On July 5, 2000, an accident occurred in which a tugboat towing an oil barge punctured a hole in the hull of the barge, thus causing an oil spill in the Narragansett Bay. Less than two weeks prior, Rhode Island celebrated the installation of PORTS in the Narragansett Bay area, and it is a good thing the system was in place. With PORTS up and running, Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management worked with NOAA and other agencies to contain the oil spill by predicting how the slick would move as a result of the current, wind and tides. PORTS was instrumental in minimizing the environmental impact from this accident and, no doubt, saved a great deal in clean up costs.

Over the years, Federal funds for the PORTS system have been meager at best, and in FY 2000 were non-existent. This year, for the first time, we may see a bigger jump in funding thanks to the support of this Committee; however, the Tides and Currents line item that funds PORTS has never received the annual $22 million outlined in the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act of 1998. PORTS must receive a stronger financial commitment from the Administration and Congress to ensure a nationally viable program. We urge the Committee to continue its push for the necessary funds in the reauthorization of the Hydrographic Services Act to guarantee that NOAA can continue to provide the quality assurance and infrastructure necessary to keep existing PORTS in operation and enable other harbors to install PORTS. Further, AAPA believes that the Federal government should pay for not only design and quality assurance, but also the installation and maintenance of PORTS systems to ensure a uniform, state-of-the-art national program.

Recommendations

Beyond the need to secure additional funding for NOAA's suite of navigation services, reauthorization of the Hydrographic Services Act presents other opportunities to improve on these services. The 1998 bill required that within six months of enactment, NOAA and the USCG were supposed to submit a report to Congress on the status of real-time tide and current data systems in U.S. ports, existing safety and efficiency needs in U.S. ports that could be met by increased use of those systems and provide a plan for expanding PORTS to enhance safety needs. NOAA did submit two reports to Congress; however, these did not go far enough in examining the current needs of the maritime industry and outlining NOAA's long-range plan for addressing these needs. AAPA suggests that before any new recommendations or plans are made with regard to the future of NOAA navigation programs, a report should be completed that includes a comprehensive review of the status of these programs, the needs of the maritime industry, and recommendations for the most cost-effective and efficient means for addressing these issues. This study

should be fully coordinated with the maritime industry. Once it is completed, the National Ocean Service (NOS) should be charged with developing a long-range strategic plan for addressing these recommendations.

AAPA believes that the National Ocean Service should develop a stakeholder advisory group to get feedback and direction from the private sector. With the growth of international trade over the next twenty years, safety will become an even greater priority. In planning to meet the needs of the maritime industry, NOS should establish this advisory group to provide guidance, expertise, and direction on navigation safety issues as well as consultation on a comprehensive review of the needs of the industry.

Finally, the bill should direct the various Federal agencies that have jurisdiction over navigation safety, such as NOAA, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Army Corps of Engineers, to better coordinate their efforts to eliminate duplication of efforts and to maximize limited resources. The 1999 Marine Transportation System (MTS) Report, *An Assessment of the U.S. Marine Transportation System,* identifies the greatest safety concern among stakeholders as the Aavailability of timely, accurate, and reliable navigation information." Therefore it suggests that NOAA work in conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard as well as local communities to design, develop and install appropriate Physical Oceanographic Real-Time Systems (PORTS) technology, accelerate the current timetable for reducing the survey backlog, and expand and develop the coverage of electronic navigational charts. AAPA believes that this cooperation will lead to better services for the maritime industry.

Conclusion

Overall, the goal of the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act of 1998 was to focus attention on improving the infrastructure of the nation's navigation systems. The Act was to provide the framework for catching up with the survey backlog and to modernize navigation operations. Though it authorized significant funding to improve NOAA's navigation services, the Administration has never requested, nor has Congress appropriated, these higher funding levels.

The bill was a positive first step towards raising awareness for navigation safety; however, we have a long way to go. Safety programs such as PORTS should not be an option for those who can afford it but a national priority funded by the Federal government. Without these essential programs that provide valuable information to mariners, there is an increased probability that maritime accidents, taking a substantial toll on the industry and the environment, will occur. It must be a Federal priority to maintain our nation's waterways, to provide the necessary tools to allow mariners to do their job, and to facilitate the commerce that provides significant economic benefits to our nation.

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