

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY
OF
CAPT. ROBERT F. ZALES, II
PRESIDENT**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHARTERBOAT OPERATORS

FOR HEARING ON

**FISHING = JOBS: HOW STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S FISHERIES
STRENGTHENS OUR ECONOMY**

**BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

AUGUST 25, 2012

Chairman Hastings, Ranking Member Markey, Representative Southerland and members of the committee, my name is Robert F. Zales, II and I am appearing today on behalf of the National Association of Charterboat Operators (NACO). NACO thanks you and the Members of the Committee for your kind invitation to present testimony on this issue today.

NACO is a non-profit 501 (c) (6) association representing charter boat owners and operators across the United States including the Great Lakes. I also serve on the Board of other recreational fishing associations and work with a national coalition of recreational for hire, private recreational, and commercial fishing associations as well as the National Ocean Policy Coalition. I have been involved in fishing for over 47 years with over 21 years of that time involved with local, state, and federal fishery management providing expert testimony, serving on a host of advisory panels, and working to ensure that reason and common sense are applied to the management of our natural resources.

On July 19, 2010 President Obama signed and executed Presidential Executive Order 13547 creating the National Ocean Policy (NOP). Two years later, this one stroke of a pen has led to the creation of the National Ocean Council (NOC) and we are awaiting the announcement of the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan. This plan will provide for the creation of 9 Regional Planning Bodies whose membership will be limited to Federal, State, and Tribal Representatives only. Regional Planning Bodies will adopt a comprehensive National ecosystem based management principal, implement comprehensive, integrated, ecosystem based coastal and marine spatial planning and management, and a host of other management objectives. As bureaucrats gather to draw lines on maps and determine the fate of significant contributors to the economy and social fabric of the nation, the fishing and boating communities simply will not have a seat at the table.

Here in the Gulf of Mexico region, 19 officials from fourteen federal entities have been identified to participate on a government-only "Regional Planning Body" (Department of Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Commerce (NOAA), Department of Homeland Security (Coast Guard), Department of Agriculture, Department of Energy, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Department of Transportation, US Air Force, and US Navy). Apparently, Mr. Chairman, you and your colleagues are not necessary to the proper management and care of our natural marine and land based resources as Congress has been left totally out of the process.

Charter, commercial, and saltwater recreational fishing is extremely important to the United States, both economically and socially. According to the NOAA publication *Fisheries Economics of the United States for 2009* Recreational Saltwater Fishing produced sales impacts from angling and durable expenditures totaling **\$50 BILLION and value added impacts of \$23 BILLION while providing over 327,000 JOBS** in 2009. In addition the Commercial Fishing industry provided over **1 MILLION JOBS, \$116 BILLION in sales and \$32 BILLION in income impacts**. Seafood Retailers added another **484,000 JOBS and contributed another \$10 BILLION** to the nations' economy. This impact is derived on less than 20% of the seafood provided locally as over 80% of our Nation's seafood is imported. According to the local Tourist Development Council, **15% of Tourism Dollars** comes from saltwater recreational fishing off Panama City. All of these industries depend on our healthy and resilient resources and must have flexibility in management in order to survive.

Recreational and commercial fishermen are already over-regulated and subjected to restricted fishing seasons, overly-restrictive bag limits and quotas, closed areas to boating and fishing, the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Marine Mammal Protection Act, engine emission regulations, marine protected areas, gear restrictions, U.S. Coast Guard regulations, manning requirements, life-saving requirements, licensing, medical review processes, navigation restrictions, and FCC radio licensing and requirements, among others.

In addition to the coastal impacts of the NOP, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation, instead of being restricted to just the oceans and coasts, the National Ocean Policy "could extend to the regulation of every farm and ranch in the United States." The

NOP national priority objective for Water Quality and Sustainable Practices on Land is to “enhance water quality in the ocean, along our coasts, and in the Great Lakes **by promoting and implementing sustainable practices on land,**” with the draft implementation plan proposing an action to “reduce rural sources of excessive nutrients, sediments, toxins and pathogens.”

Under the Regional Ecosystem Protection & Restoration national priority objective, the NOC has proposed in part to “support the development and implementation of State-wide nitrogen and phosphorus reduction strategies in the Mississippi River Basin and Gulf region” and the “development of State regulatory certainty programs for reducing nutrient and sediment loads”: will “support” of states translate to coercion, as is taking place in the Chesapeake Bay watershed? The Mississippi River Basin spans from Montana to New York, draining water from parts or all of 31 states. The new overlay of federal requirements could negatively affect home builders, private landowners, and other businesses. Furthermore, the significant financial and human resources that will be required to implement this massive new program, that has not been authorized by Congress, stands to harm all economic sectors--including those that operate solely on land--that are dependent in some part on already-squeezed federal programs and resources.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes this portion of my testimony. Again, I truly appreciate the invitation and opportunity to provide you and the committee with this information. I will be pleased to respond to any questions.