

**Testimony of  
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Before the  
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Hearing on H.R. 21 – The Ocean Conservation, Education and National Strategy for the  
21st Century Act  
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Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, my name is Kristen Fletcher and I am Executive Director of the Coastal States Organization. Since 1970, CSO has represented the interests of the Governors of the 35 coastal states and territories in Washington, DC on legislative and policy issues relating to the sound management of coastal, Great Lakes, and ocean resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify to the issues of improved ocean governance and please include my written testimony in the record.

CSO recognizes the consistent leadership provided by Representative Farr for proposing the comprehensive ocean governance approach reflected in Oceans 21. With the variety of jurisdictions and authorities, federal, state, local, and tribal, it is clear that ocean governance reform is critical. Recognizing this need, the Administration recently created an Interagency Ocean Task Force to develop recommendations for a National Ocean Policy within 90 days. We look forward to working with both Congress and the Administration to see a National Ocean Policy become a reality.

Despite efforts on the part of state and federal agencies, the management of U.S. coasts and oceans is characterized by a sector-by-sector approach and one that is primarily reactive rather than proactive. A national ocean policy and framework for improved governance, as envisioned by Oceans 21, will allow both federal and state partners to be better positioned to respond to the numerous emerging uses of our public trust resources – especially the increasing rise of traditional and renewable energy in coastal and offshore areas – and the need for comprehensive adaptation approaches to climate change.

Coastal states are at the forefront of addressing coastal resource issues and creating governance regimes to advance better management. Many coastal states are now formally part of regional ocean partnerships and, as evidenced by the Ocean and Coastal Policy adopted by the National Governors Association this year, the nations' Governors, inland and coastal, are on record as supporting reforms in ocean and coastal governance, including a strengthened and reauthorized Coastal Zone Management Act, renewed attention to coastal non point source pollution, implementation of an ocean science strategy, development of a robust ocean observing system, and targeted support for ocean literacy.

Oceans 21 has the components needed to advance these priorities, specifically to reform ocean governance, improve the health of our oceans and coasts, create a national ocean policy and a

NOAA Organic Act, improve coordination of federal action, coordinate management for our federal waters, and create a much-needed ocean and coastal trust fund. Overall, the bill would help reorient government to formalize the practice of ecosystem-based management and has the potential to build on the work already done in the existing regional ocean partnerships.

While we are in support of all elements in Oceans 21, my testimony on behalf of the coastal states' governors will focus on Title III, regional ocean governance, Title IV, the establishment of a trust fund and briefly on Title I, a statement of national ocean policy.

## **I. Regional Ocean Governance**

Governors of the coastal states are leading the way in implementing regional ocean governance. The Great Lakes Commission, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, the Northeast Regional Ocean Council, the West Coast Governors Agreement, the Southeast Governors' Alliance, and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean are examples of state-led efforts that are moving management of ocean and coastal resources from a state-by-state approach to a regional one. To build on the accomplishments of these partnerships, the regional efforts as described in Oceans 21 are voluntary, flexible, and state- or territory-driven. The existing partnerships provide a valuable forum for coordination, rather than a new bureaucracy.

The states strongly support the following key elements of Title III of Oceans 21, the regional governance section of the bill. We agree that:

- A national framework is needed to advance and support regional efforts by state, territory and federal governments to develop and implement integrated ecosystem-based plans;
- Regionally-based plans should be action-oriented and directed toward achieving shared goals and priorities;
- There should be significant opportunities for public input and involvement;
- More information is needed to improve management of our oceans and coasts; and,
- A mechanism is needed to develop, fund and implement regional plans.

The states and territories applaud the forward-thinking nature of these elements.

In establishing regional efforts, Oceans 21 gives us the opportunity to take advantage of the foundation already laid by existing regional ocean partnerships. Let me provide you with a few examples.

As members of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, the Gulf States have been able to accomplish more as a region than as individual states including establishment of Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers in each Gulf State and Veracruz, Mexico, creation of a Regional Sediment Management Master Plan developed to decrease coastal erosion and support restoration, the holding of three bi-national workshops to standardize harmful algal bloom identification and sampling methods, and the creation of an ecosystem data portal established to evaluate habitat extent and changes over time. Just last week, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance released its Second Governors' Action Plan for Healthy and Resilient Coasts. The new action plan builds on these accomplishments and identifies concrete action items to be addressed regionally with measures of success.

The West Coast Governors' Agreement also provided opportunity for regional accomplishments benefiting the nation's west coast, especially in the area of research and access to data and information. Integrated Ecosystem Assessments have been initiated in Puget Sound and laid the foundation for the development of the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment. In addition, a West Coast Sea Grant regional research needs report was released for public comment in December 2008, representing issues from all three states. Finally, seafloor mapping workshops were held in Washington and Oregon in January and March 2008. With urging from Governor Gregoire, the Navy lifted long-standing restrictions on access to seafloor data collected by NOAA.

Finally, the Great Lakes which has been collaborating as a region for decades, has established a sub-regional effort focused on alternative energy. The Great Lakes Wind Collaborative (GLWC) is a multi-sector coalition of wind energy stakeholders working to facilitate the sustainable development of wind power in the bi-national Great Lakes region. Collaborative workgroups include Economic Development, Environmental Planning, Siting and Permitting, Offshore Wind, Transmission, Wind Atlas (Online GIS Mapping), and Workforce Development and Education.

Oceans 21 adds value to these existing efforts by building onto their foundations, creating a national framework that supports them and by creating long-term, consistent funding for them.

## **II. Ocean and Great Lakes Trust Fund**

Oceans 21 also takes an important step in creating a consistent funding source for the regional efforts. While federal agencies have been extremely responsive to new partnerships with regional efforts, these approaches have proceeded with minimal funding resources, relying with a few exceptions, on in-kind support from federal agency staff with no new dedicated funds.

The coastal states and territories strongly support the trust fund in Oceans 21 to improve the management of ocean, coastal and Great Lakes resources. The Coastal States Organization, National Governors Association, Great Lakes Commission and Joint Ocean Commission Initiative are on record in support of such a comprehensive trust fund, of which this is an important element.

The Regional Ocean Partnerships are also on record regarding federal funding. In a Joint Statement in February of this year, the Partnerships came together for the first time to speak as one voice and their message was clear. Today's coastal and ocean challenges far exceed the resources that states can bring to the partnership table. Financial assistance and federal agency expertise, especially in the areas of data acquisition, mapping, monitoring and research, are needed to achieve the necessary seamless federal, state, and local approach to ocean and coastal management envisioned.

Our coasts and oceans provide 28 million jobs, recreation for 189 million tourists, \$740 billion in waterborne overseas trade, and homes for the majority of the country's population. Even in these

lean economic times, an investment in the regional partnerships is a contribution to the nation's ability to manage the coasts and oceans – and, thus, a healthy economic investment.

### **III. Creation of a National Ocean Policy**

If adopted, Oceans 21 would enact a statement of national ocean policy. This is an important step as the oceans and coasts are an economic, environmental, and cultural resource for the nation. The states applaud the inclusive nature of the Committee on Ocean Policy. The territories, states and federal government share sovereignty for our ocean and coastal resources, and we are responsible for the wise management of this public trust. Management will best be accomplished through a partnership between the states and federal agencies using processes that provide for stakeholder input and involvement.

An important part of this national policy is a legislative provision that directs improvement of coordination of the federal agencies. Currently, the uses of our ocean are all regulated separately, fisheries in one agency, energy in another, sediment management in another, shipping and maritime activities in yet another. No government agency or body is charged with looking across the stovepipes of programs to see how all of the different uses of our oceans fit together. If we want to improve the health of our oceans, this needs to change. Oceans 21 takes on this challenge.

### **IV. Complement Existing Legal Structures**

Finally, as we continue to work on improving the management of our oceans, it is important to acknowledge the many puzzle pieces that form our coastal and ocean management framework. As we reform governance, we must ensure that these existing laws are well integrated and complementary to any new structure that is established. For example, for over 35 years, the Coastal Zone Management Act has been the primary state/federal partnership for managing our country's coastal resources. Ecosystem-based approaches to governance should acknowledge the interrelationship between coastal watersheds and the ocean, which means new ocean governance mechanisms like Oceans 21 need to fit "hand in glove" with existing structures like the CZMA.

### **Closing**

In closing, thank you again for your leadership on these issues and for inviting me to testify today. The coastal states and territories look forward with enthusiasm to continued work with committee staff, nongovernmental partners, federal agencies and others to see Oceans 21 become a reality and to ensure healthy oceans in the future. I welcome any questions you may have.