

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Witness Statement

Testimony for H.Res. 415

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For the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife & Oceans

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I would like to thank Congressman H. James Saxton and the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans for the opportunity to offer my support of H.Res. 415 proposing the establishment of a National Ocean Day. I would like to offer my special thanks to Congressman Saxton for his support of science education in New Jersey and specifically for the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve. I also would like to thank Congressman Pallone for his support of marine science education and outreach associated with the National Undersea Research Program.

My name is Janice McDonnell and I am the Associate Director of Project Tomorrow, a K-12 Science Education and Outreach program at the Institute of Marine & Coastal Sciences at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. I also am the Education Coordinator for the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve (JC NERR) at Mullica River -Great Bay, NJ. Encompassing more than 110,000 acres of state and federal lands, the JC NERR promotes research, education, and stewardship within the Mullica River-Great Bay watershed. My position centers on working with university scientists to bring the information and excitement of contemporary marine science research to a broad range of audiences including K-12 teachers, students, families, and local decision-makers. For the last seven years, I have had the pleasure of sharing my appreciation and knowledge of marine science with hundreds of New Jersey teachers, thousands of students, and countless local government officials through Project Tomorrow and Reserve supported education programs.

As an educator, I have strongly supported national celebrations such as National Estuaries Day and Coast Week. National Estuaries Day is a very productive tool that draws attention of citizens' to the importance and value of estuaries. Each year, festivals and celebrations take place at each of the twenty-five National Estuarine Research Reserves and twenty-eight National Estuary Programs. These events highlight the unique nature and ecological importance of these fertile waterways where the rivers meet the sea. Similarly, National Coast Week provides an opportunity for citizens to become involved in beach clean ups and to participate in community activities designed to raise awareness about the coastal zone. Coast Week provides a strong message for how and why citizens should be involved in preserving and protecting the coastal zone. Unquestionably these national celebrations are extremely useful in promoting environmental education. A National Ocean Day would be extremely valuable in highlighting the significant role the ocean plays in the lives of our nation's citizens and perhaps more importantly, how our citizens must participate in good

decision-making for the wise use and protection of our water resources.

Our nation's quality of life, social well being, character, and economic vitality depend in great measure on the health of its rivers, bays, and the ocean. In New Jersey, these waters constitute the life-blood of the state since more than \$100 billion in annual revenue is directly related to goods and services from the coastal environment. Economic benefits are derived from fisheries and aquaculture, pharmaceuticals from the sea, coastal tourism, and maritime activities. Of the top 50 employers in New Jersey, more than half rely on the coast to some extent in sustaining their business prosperity. To support this economic vitality, New Jersey has invested in educational programs that support life-long learning from kindergarten through adult and have provided leadership in management and protection of marine and coastal environments.

An important aspect of one approach to life long learning is the Marine Activities Resources & Education (MARE) program, offered to K-8 educators and their students. This program offers enrichment programs to schools in math, science, language arts, and music using the marine environment as the focus. Each grade level studies a different marine habitat, with younger students focusing their learning on near-shore environments, and older students expanding their study to more complex marine ecosystems. Our greatest success with the MARE program has been with Ocean Week celebrations, which take place in May and June of the school year. These Ocean Week celebrations are culminating community events that involve parents, students, teachers, local community organizations, and town officials in celebrating the study of the ocean. School lunch rooms, classrooms, and gyms become underwater habitats, as the students create beautiful murals and creative displays of their work and achievements in their ocean studies. Ocean Weeks involve the entire community from the school cafeteria staff to the town mayor. To date we have approximately twenty schools and more than 12,000 school children leading their communities in Ocean Week celebrations.

A National Ocean Day would serve as an entry point to heighten additional interest and understanding in ocean sciences. At the Institute of Marine & Coastal Science, this natural interest has been used as a spring board to encourage educators and their students to use the marine environment as a focal point to develop basic skills in reading, writing, math, problem solving, and critical thinking. With the selection of programs like MARE, and the development of collaborative school projects, and Internet connections that link students with scientists and ocean data, science education has become more exciting and more relevant to current environmental policy issues. With this approach, educators can short circuit the arduous rote memorization exercise commonly associated with the study of science and replace it with first hand experiences of the scientific and cultural resources of the nation's ocean. By encouraging scientists and educators to work together to spark interesting and meaningful science learning in the classroom, students become well prepared not only for scientific careers but as informed decision-makers and citizens.

Organizations such as the National Marine Education Association (NMEA) with its seventeen state affiliated chapters could serve as supporters and promoters of a National Ocean Day. NMEA brings together those interested in the study and enjoyment of the world of water--both fresh and salt. Affiliated with the National Science Teachers Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, NMEA provides a valuable focus for marine and aquatic studies worldwide. As president of our local chapter, the New Jersey Marine Education Association (NJMEA), I have the support of our membership of 171 formal and informal educators, students, and recreational divers. This dedicated consortium of people would serve as strong advocates and local ambassadors for National Ocean day activities.

There is increasing interest and support of ocean sciences by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and organizations such as the Consortium for Oceanographic Research and Education (CORE). I recently had

the privilege of serving on an advisory panel to NSF to explore the merits of creating a Center for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence (COSEE). Educators and scientists from across the nation gathered in Long Beach, Mississippi, to discuss the benefits of support from the NSF Ocean Science Division for a center. Dr. Margaret Leinen, Director of the Ocean Science Directorate at NSF identified the need to think deeply and proactively about how we can improve awareness of ocean sciences, increase the diversity of those working in ocean related jobs, and improve awareness of ocean science and the perception of social relevance. The establishment of a National Ocean Day would support these goals.

In closing, I would again like to thank the Congressman Saxton and the committee for this opportunity to support H. Res. 415. I strongly encourage you to adopt a National Ocean Day resolution. This resolution be an extremely valuable tool in highlighting the significant role the ocean plays in the lives of our nation's citizens and perhaps more importantly, how our citizens must participate in good decision-making for the wise use and protection of our water resources.

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