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BEFORE THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS
ON
H.R. 1489: COASTAL OCEAN OBSERVATION SYSTEM INTEGRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION ACT OF 2005

APRIL 19, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Department of the Interior (DOI) on H.R. 1489, the Coastal Ocean Observation System Integration and Implementation Act of 2005.

This bill advances a central priority of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (the Ocean Commission) and the U.S. Ocean Action Plan: to establish an integrated and sustained coastal ocean observation system capable of meeting a diversity of regional and national information requirements for the purposes of advancing ocean science and resource management.

The continued and accelerated development of the coastal observation system reflects a shared recognition that our ability to wisely use, manage and preserve our ocean and coastal resources requires new tools, new systems, and new partnerships that are focused on a broad community of interest. The DOI is committed to continuing our role as a developer, implementer, and user of an integrated and sustained coastal ocean observing system.

Two DOI Bureaus, the Minerals Management Service (MMS) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), have played significant roles in IOOS through the interagency planning effort. The USGS and MMS are charter members of the National Ocean Research Leadership Council, the National Oceanographic Partnership Program, and the Executive Committee of Ocean US. The interagency planning group has made substantial progress in implementing IOOS through the interagency planning effort. This group has defined the structure, governance, and requirements for a system including both the coastal and global components. The IOOS goals are ambitious: however; through a collaborative approach the Administration has ensured that IOOS system development reflects the diverse needs identified so far and maintains the flexibility to adapt to future needs, effectively building on the available expertise and resources in the Department and throughout the Government and private sector.

DOI's interests in a coastal ocean observing system are as broad as our agency missions and mandates. The Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) promises to provide enhanced information, models and tools that support the broad resource protection and management objectives of the National Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. IOOS would also contribute significantly to the development of ecosystem-based management approaches that cannot be effectively met by unilateral agency action. An IOOS relevant to mobile and migratory resources requires integration and product development at regional, national, and larger scales. Increasing engagement of these DOI agencies is necessary to ensure system responsiveness to their management needs.

MINERALS MANAGEMENT SERVICE

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) serves as steward of the energy and mineral resources on 1.76 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). MMS is focused on enhancing the information base required to ensure safe and environmentally sound development of our offshore realm for the economic and security benefit of the Nation. MMS engagement in IOOS greatly facilitates efforts to ensure partnerships with industry. This contributes to both specific and broad goals of the observing system. For example, MMS has worked collaboratively with industry to establish and implement an ocean current monitoring and data-sharing program in the Gulf of Mexico, as cited in the U.S. Ocean Action Plan. Under this program, deepwater oil and gas platform operators will collect ocean current data from deepwater drilling and productions sites and provide those data to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Data Buoy Center (NDBC). This effort provides site-specific data for forecasting ocean currents that may affect structural design, fatigue criteria, or daily operations. This falls squarely under the goals of IOOS, but as an added benefit, the integration of the data into IOOS enhances the Department-wide ability to address broader goals related to regional ecosystem research and management.

Through its active engagement with industry, MMS ensures that industry needs are reflected in system design and that industry capacity is applied to the breadth of observing system objectives, thus clearly demonstrating the substantial benefits

of shared leadership and an inclusive development process.

Through MMS, DOI intends to co-chair with NOAA a subcommittee to conduct assessments of the IOOS systems. In accordance with the U.S. Ocean Action Plan, the MMS will facilitate the engagement of those offshore industries involved in the exploration and development of the energy and mineral resources of the outer continental shelf in the development of a comprehensive observing system. MMS, working with NOAA and through the national ocean governance structure, will ensure that OCS relevant information needs are effectively integrated into the system promoting safe and environmentally sound development while deriving both economic and security benefits.

MMS's information needs for, and contributions to, such activities will undoubtedly increase. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy recommended the development of legislation providing for the comprehensive management of offshore renewable energy development as part of a coordinated offshore management regime. In 2002, the Administration proposed legislation that would amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act by establishing a uniform permitting process coordinated across appropriate Federal agencies, with DOI serving as the lead Federal agency. The Commission's report cited the Department's experience in managing the oil, gas, and mineral programs on the OCS as providing a successful management model for a wide variety of offshore activities. The proposed legislation would direct the Secretary of the Interior to establish an authorization process and regulatory framework for non-traditional energy projects including, but not limited to, renewable energy projects such as wind, wave, and solar energy. The proposed bill would also authorize DOI to permit OCS facilities to be converted to other approved uses. The Administration continues to support this legislation and we appreciate this provision being included in the House energy bill. Using its OCS oil and gas and marine minerals management experience, it is clear that MMS will have to work even closer with industry and NOAA, and within the Administration's newly developing ocean governance structure, to ensure that all OCS relevant information needs are effectively integrated into the observing system structure.

UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

DOI shares the science and research goals of IOOS. The USGS, the Nation's principal Federal natural science and information agency, plays a leading role in IOOS by conducting and providing reliable scientific information to the Nation's resource managers. USGS scientific research in water, biology, geology, geography and geographic information services directly supports many of the identified goals of IOOS.

Through the USGS, DOI intends to co-chair with NOAA a subcommittee charged with implementing the transition of pilot projects to operational units of the coastal component of IOOS. In accordance with the U.S. Ocean Action Plan, the USGS will work with other federal and non-governmental interests to coordinate coastal and ocean mapping in support of IOOS goals and develop and integrate National Water Quality observations and streamflow monitoring. The USGS will support the Data Management and Communications element of IOOS with respect to real-time operational networks, data integration, geospatial data and products, and biological inventory and monitoring. The USGS will facilitate the engagement of the land management and water resource communities in the development of a comprehensive observing system.

The USGS mission is fundamentally enhanced by successful implementation of an integrated and sustained coastal ocean observing system. The USGS brings expertise in the development and implementation of observational systems that are directly relevant to the goals of this effort. Integration of USGS programs and expertise related to water quality monitoring, hydrologic networks, geospatial data and systems, geologic mapping, biological inventory and monitoring, and multidisciplinary research and modeling support the success of the proposed coastal ocean observing system. As the IOOS coastal observing component matures, we can expect it to shift focus from those physical variables accessible with current technologies to new observations of chemical and biological variables. USGS capabilities, particularly in the biological and water chemistry realm, could support the future development of an observing system responsive to ecosystem-based management needs.

USGS water programs provide insights into the challenges that remain for successful integration and implementation of a coastal ocean-observing component. USGS water quality and streamgaging networks provide baseline information to document and understand land-derived inputs to coastal systems and thus watershed influences. However, existing observations serve a broad range of research, regulatory, and management needs across the landscape beyond strictly marine issues; including water quality, reservoir operations and emergency evacuations, water availability, flood forecasting, and aquatic ecosystem health. These needs, and the partnerships that have supported the development of existing observing assets, must be reflected in system integration, development, and maintenance. Effectively meeting the needs of the broadest community of interest is a challenge we will repeatedly face as we strive to ensure that coastal ocean observing systems contribute to and benefit from integration with broader earth observing systems.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Focused largely on terrestrial and aquatic systems, with vast expertise in sensor development, system design, data assurance and quality control, data management, and information delivery, the Nation's water science and water resource management community provides a critical mass of existing interest and expertise necessary to effectively develop enhanced coastal networks and engage the private sector in research, development, and commercialization. Through DOI's and the Department of Commerce's leadership and continued involvement of these communities, there exists a tremendous opportunity to develop partnerships from existing communities that have not traditionally been engaged.

Both the Ocean Commission and the Administration have identified the critical importance of understanding watershed impacts on coastal systems to meet the objectives of ecosystem-based management. The proposed coastal ocean observing system must encompass this goal, and must do so by engaging expertise outside the marine community and federal marine programs. The governance of the proposed coastal ocean observing system must facilitate broad engagement and capture the substantial existing assets required for effective integration and implementation.

The success of the coastal observing system depends on specific expertise, interests, and partnerships within diverse programs across a large number of federal agencies and outside the federal sector. The governance challenge remaining is how to honor these interests and build upon these substantial assets while establishing the authority and accountability required for successful system development.

The current collaborative and consensus-building approach continues to serve us well to this point. However, to advance IOOS more efficiently, streamlining the decision making process is needed.

The U.S. Ocean Action Plan establishes a governance structure for ocean and coastal policy broadly. The oversight, coordination, and integration entities established ensure the broadest engagement within and beyond the federal sector. The U.S. Ocean Action Plan includes specific recommendations for the creation of a National Water Quality Network and coordination of Ocean and Coastal Mapping Activities. These are essential elements of an integrated coastal observation system. In both cases, the Committee on Ocean Policy provides broad federal leadership. Both the Ocean Commission and the U.S. Ocean Action Plan neglect to identify leadership roles for specific federal agencies. This was deemed an appropriate function of the new governance entities. For example, the NSTC Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology will lead the effort to define roles and responsibilities of federal and non-federal entities in the coordination of coastal and ocean mapping; ensuring the breadth of interests and expertise are appropriately reflected. Preliminary efforts have identified substantial interest and capabilities among federal agencies that have not been extensively engaged in IOOS development to date.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION AND THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Interagency coordination is essential for planning and implementation of IOOS. As such an interagency body should provide high level oversight for IOOS and an interagency program office should develop plans and requirements for that interagency body's ultimate approval.

Each agency that participates in IOOS brings different capabilities and areas of expertise to the program. The roles and responsibilities of each agency need to be clearly defined and explicitly outlined. The Administration, through the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology of the National Science and Technology Council and the Committee on Ocean Policy, is currently working to address this issue. However, for the purposes of implementation and operation of IOOS, the Administration recognizes the importance of having a clear point of accountability. As such the Administration believes that NOAA should be the lead federal agency for the administration and implementation of IOOS. We are confident, however, that DOI's significant role in the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) will continue to provide enhanced research, information, models and tools that contribute significantly to the development of ecosystem-based management approaches. This supports the broad resource protection and management objectives needed to protect and ensure access to our Nation's ocean resources.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. Please allow me to express my sincere appreciation for the continued support that this committee has provided the Department of the Interior. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.