

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

**Statement of Kurt Allen
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on behalf of the
Management Association for Private Photogrammetric Surveyors (MAPPS)
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before the
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife & Oceans
Committee on Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Implementation of the
Hydrographic Services Improvement Act
(Public Law 105-384)
September 13, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, I am Kurt Allen, Division Manager of Greenhorne & O'Mara, Inc. My firm provides a full spectrum of surveying and mapping services to the USGS, NIMA, Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service, among other Federal agencies.

Our firm is based in Greenbelt, Maryland. I am personally a resident of Annapolis. We employ more than 350 persons in Maryland and another 350 in offices in North Carolina, Florida, Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Georgia.

Let me first commend this Subcommittee for its leadership in creating the hydrographic survey contracting program in NOAA in the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act. This subcommittee, together with the Commerce Appropriations Subcommittee, has for the past 7 years, provided the leadership that has long been needed to make the necessary changes in NOAA that benefit the American taxpayer, the recreational and commercial boating community, and the private surveying and mapping profession. We also commend NOAA for the new direction it has begun with regard to utilization of the private sector for hydrographic surveying, shoreline mapping, height modernization, aerial photography, and airport surveys.

For the services that NOAA has begun contracting to the private sector, we believe the agency is highly satisfied. Private firms have been innovative in staffing, scheduling and deployment to ensure that the government receives value for its money. Currently, almost all the NOAA hydrographic contractors are MAPPS member firms.

Our members in the hydrographic program believe the professional relationship that has been established and the development of new tools and techniques for efficient acquisition and processing of hydrographic data in support of nautical charting is beneficial to both NOAA and the private sector, and to the nation as a whole. With the significant national backlog in critical areas requiring hydrographic surveys, MAPPS fully supports the need to expand budget allocations for this program. This backlog forms a strong basis for the increased use of the private sector for the conduct of hydrographic surveys, and for the NOAA Corps officers and civilians to be refocused on inherently governmental activities such as in contract administration and quality control.

The critical expertise in hydrography resident within NOAA can be of significant assistance to the private sector in the form of necessary standardization, certification, quality control and contract administration.

However, there are still a number of qualified private firms, including those experienced in performing hydrographic services for the Corps of Engineers in its inland waterways program, that have not been selected for contracts by NOAA. Mr. Chairman, there is additional private sector capacity and capability that could be utilized to further enhance the capabilities of NOAA.

We would urge the Subcommittee to *decrease* the authorized level for NOAA ownership and operation of hydrographic survey vessels. As you may know, despite the progress that has been made, and the leadership exerted by this Subcommittee, the NOAA survey ship operation activities remain on the General Accounting Office list of high risk programs, and as recently as January of this year, continues to be a major management challenge and program risk in the Department of Commerce. GAO found, "NOAA continues to rely heavily on its in-house fleet and still plans to replace or upgrade some of these ships. Consequently, continued oversight of NOAA's plans to replace or upgrade ships will be needed to ensure that NOAA is pursuing the most cost-effective alternatives for acquiring marine data." (GAO-01-243, Commerce Challenges, January 2001)

NOAA can stretch its dollars in the production of nautical charts to support commerce and ensure safe navigation by transforming itself into an organization that performs only those services that are inherently governmental in nature. It should not be expending funds for in-house performance of commercially available mapping activities.

There is a capable and qualified private sector in mapping that can and should be used to a greater extent by NOAA. These activities include not only hydrography, but geodetic surveying, aerial photography, remote sensing, and photogrammetric mapping, and the actual production of electronic navigational charts (ENCs).

We believe NOAA should focus its in-house activities on the establishment of professional and technical standards, certification of data, research and development, funding and administration of grants, and to perform those services that are inherently governmental in nature and which are not competitive with the private sector.

We would urge the inclusion of the following provisions in the reauthorization of the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act:

- NOAA should use the private sector for all commercially available surveying and mapping services. This is not only required by OMB policy (SEE OMB Circular A-76), but by language in the FY 96 Commerce Appropriations bill. It should be noted that NOAA has still not completed a fully inventory of all its commercial mapping activities, as it is required to do by the Federal Activities

Inventory Reform (FAIR) Act, Public Law 105-270);

- NOAA should maintain an "intellectual" core capability in hydrography, versus a large dollar capital capability;
- NOAA should provide a more steady stream of funding to enhance the productivity and efficiency of contractors even further; and it should strive to improve its contract management capability.
- A NOAA data certification program for Electronic Navigational Chart data, and the S-57 format, is needed for private sector firms. We would urge the Committee to amend section 304 of PL 105-384 by changing the "may" to "shall" with regard to establishing a data certification program and establishing a statutory deadline for NOAA to implement such a program. We regret that NOAA has not utilized the authority it was granted in 1998.
- The cap on funds for in-house NOAA ships should be *lowered*, and revised to include both ownership and operation of vessels. MAPPS opposes NOAA's leasing of ships. This strategy fails to resolve the issue of unfair government competition, and fails to take advantage of the saving of dollars and increased efficiency identified by the Inspector General, that could be realized by contracting to firms that have the ships, equipment, personnel and expertise to meet NOAA's needs.
- The expansion of private sector utilization for photogrammetry, geodesy, remote sensing, aerial photography and other commercially available geospatial activities is both welcomed and encouraged.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and your subcommittee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

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