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Statement of the Honorable Frank Pallone

Hearing on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Authorizing Legislation

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

March 27, 2003

Thank you Mr. Chairman. NOAA's activities and programs are of great interest to me and the Democrat members of this subcommittee. I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses today. Welcome to you all.

NOAA is tasked with the enormous responsibility of managing our nation's coastal and ocean resources. However, the nation's responsibilities for managing our coasts and oceans has changed over the three decades of the agency's existence, and our operative policies should accurately reflect this evolution.

Therefore, I support the intentions of this legislation in so far as they mostly modernize and clarify existing authorities. But I must express some apprehension at acting prior to the release of comprehensive reviews of our ocean policy by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission.

In the Oceans Act of 2000, Congress tasked the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy to complete a comprehensive evaluation of ocean and coastal policies, programs, and activities, and subsequently to recommend modifications to federal laws and the structure of federal agencies. This leaves me to question why this subcommittee at this time is considering legislation to authorize the existing administration and organizational structure of NOAA, which will assuredly fall under this commission's recommendations.

I am not implying that these bills are without substance or merit. On the contrary, authorization of a program to establish a coordinated ocean and coastal observing system has been warranted for several years. In particular, I have long been a strong supporter of the National Undersea Research Program and the fisheries management oriented research that the program supports in New Jersey and the mid-Atlantic region.

Before acting to authorize NOAA as a whole, the subcommittee should first consider the broader context surrounding these issues, and consequently, it is my belief that a more thorough vetting of these ideas among states, local governments, and the private sector is essential.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your interest in NOAA. I look forward to working cooperatively with you, and with the other members of this subcommittee, to ensure that NOAA remains the Federal Government's pre-eminent ocean authority. I also look forward to future hearings later this year when this subcommittee convenes to consider the final recommendations of these two national commissions. Thank you.