

# **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 the Honorable Robert Underwood**  
**Oversight Hearing on the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act of 1998, and other**  
**National Ocean Service programs**  
**House Resources Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans**  
**September 13, 2001**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has few roles more important than the one we are here to discuss today. Hydrographic surveying is an essential element of waterborne trade. The National Ocean Service, part of NOAA, and its predecessor, the Coast Survey, have had responsibility for maintaining hydrographic data since 1807. That is, since practically the founding of this nation, hydrographic surveying has been recognized as an integral part of the duties of the government, and is one of the oldest government functions.

As we all know, ships are not cheap to operate. Hydrographic data is not cheap to gather; nor is it simple to process this data and create useable, accurate nautical charts. But this is what NOAA is statutorily required to do, and it is Congress's job to support NOAA and provide it with the resources to fulfill its hydrographic obligations. NOAA must maintain an in-house hydrographic capability and the expertise necessary to carry out this mandate.

I can sympathize with the quandary NOAA finds itself in - a huge backlog of ocean areas that need to be surveyed and a limited budget. Long-term planning by NOAA is also hindered by the uncertainty of future appropriations. But I have to ask the question: Why has NOAA not asked for more money for ship surveying operations, either in-house or otherwise? NOAA has requested just over \$20 million for these activities in Fiscal Year 2002. Yet according to the Marine Navigation Safety Coalition, NOAA should be requesting closer to \$80 million to address the surveying backlog and various other related projects - 4 times the amount requested by NOAA.

A balance must be reached, as I am sure we will hear today, between NOAA's in-house abilities and private survey capabilities. The need to rapidly address the most pressing survey data deficiencies must be balanced with the need to produce and provide the most accurate data and hydrographic products possible.

I was very glad to see the report that NOAA finally produced on "Maintaining Federal Expertise and Capability in Hydrography." Within the report several options are given as to how NOAA can fulfill its mandate in the future. No one option was chosen as the final answer to all the hydrographic surveying problems, but a general plan of action was given in the conclusion. I am very interested in carrying on a discussion on how this general plan will be turned into specifics so that our surveying backlog can be addressed and remedied through the most thorough and efficient methods possible.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on an issue so critical to safe marine commerce and transportation, and to the economic and social well-being of millions of Americans.

# # #