

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE JIM SAXTON, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS, AT THE MARKUP ON H.R. 2090, EXPLORATION OF THE SEAS ACT: MARCH 23, 2000.

This morning, we are marking up H.R. 2090, the Exploration of the Seas Act. This bill requires the Secretary of Commerce to contract with the National Academy of Sciences to establish a Coordinated Oceanography Program Advisory Panel consisting of individuals with academic expertise in oceanography, marine biology, marine geology, fisheries biology, and ocean-related economics. The Panel will submit a report to Congress on the feasibility and social value of a coordinated international oceanography program. Recent technological advances have, for the first time in human history, given us the ability to understand and fully explore the world's oceans. Unfortunately, the United States and other nations which conduct significant oceanographic research do not yet have in place a comprehensive plan for determining what data needs to be collected, or for integrating that data into an easily usable system. Therefore, we may not be making the most productive and efficient use of the new technologies available to us, or the best investments of our limited resources.

Over the past 15 years, there have been tremendous advances in oceanographic technology, and formerly classified military technology and data have been made available to the research community. A variety of new oceanographic programs employ these technologies on both large oceanic and smaller regional scales.

The most well known of these programs is the Tropical Atmosphere-Ocean Array which provided the first accurate El Niño predictions two years ago. I am pleased that another of these programs, the Long-Term Ecosystem Observatory at 15 meters, better known as LEO-15, is located in my Congressional District. LEO-15 monitors the biology, geology, chemistry and oceanography of the outer continental shelf, and will lead to a better understanding of currents, fisheries and sediment transport along the East Coast. In the less than five years that LEO-15 has been operational, results are already beginning to provide important insights into the ocean environment.

We now have technological abilities to understand the ocean as never before. H.R. 2090 is a positive step in moving this technology forward in an efficient and meaningful way.

I urge support for the Exploration of the Seas Act.

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