

Committee on Resources

Chairman Young's Statement

The Honorable Don Young (R-AK), Chairman,
Committee on Resources, at the
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans
Hearing Concerning the FY 1998
Budget Request for
the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration:
February 27, 1997.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased that we have Dr. Baker here today to discuss NOAA's budget request for Fiscal Year 1998. In general, the request seems to protect most NOAA programs as well as can be expected in this budget climate. However, I am concerned about several specific items in the request.

The budget continues to fund navigation services at roughly this year's level. However, at this level it will take more than 40 years to survey the backlog of 24,000 square nautical miles in Alaska that are considered critical to marine transportation and environmental safety, not to mention the 19,000 square nautical miles of critical survey areas in the lower 48. Nor is this funding level adequate to take advantage of the new digital electronic and real-time technologies that are now available. I urge NOAA to give more attention to this program in the future.

I am also concerned that NOAA announced 13 months ago its intention to disestablish the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps, but has thus far failed to provide Congress with a plan for carrying out this proposal. NOAA Corps officers do fine work in my State and throughout the Nation, and their fate should be resolved immediately. I expect to either see a disestablishment plan in the very near future, or see you withdraw this proposal.

My next concern is that NOAA's request includes an increase for Climate and Air Quality Research but a significant reduction for Ocean and Great Lakes Research. This reduction includes cuts to the Sea Grant and the National Undersea Research Programs and the elimination of Arctic research funding. All three of these items are important to Alaska, and I will work to see that they are adequately funded. Ron Dearborn, Director of Alaska's Sea Grant Program, testified this morning before this Subcommittee on Sea Grant's importance. I am sure next year's budget request will treat ocean programs more favorably.

I am disappointed to see that the Administration has chosen to ignore the authorization levels set in the recently enacted Coastal Zone Management Act reauthorization. That Act, which passed with Administration support, authorizes \$49 million in grants to coastal states in Fiscal Year 1998. However, the Administration now requests an extra unauthorized \$18 million for these grants. Given the other programs in NOAA which are being cut or need additional resources, I find it hard to justify spending beyond the authorized level for coastal zone management. In the future, I expect the Administration to honor limits set in authorizing statutes.

Finally, I have been hearing from constituents that the National Marine Fisheries Service's North Pacific regional office is discussing a delay in the submission of the license limitation package due to insufficient funds and manpower. I find this disturbing since it has been almost two years since the Council passed this package and we haven't heard from the National Marine Fisheries Service about any problems.

Included in this package is an allocation of Bering Sea crab for the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program. The Magnuson-Stevens Act currently requires the Secretary to implement the crab CDQ starting January 1, 1998. This is a mandate from Congress not a Secretarial discretion. I would like to hear how the National Marine Fisheries Service plans to move this package so the CDQ crab allocation is implemented on time.

Despite these reservations, I do appreciate your coming today, and look forward to your testimony.

#

DY:jrm