

Gov. Tony Knowles' Remarks
U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
1:15 p.m., Aug. 21, Anchorage
Hotel Captain Cook - Discovery Ballroom

Thank you very much, Admiral Watkins, for bringing your commission's inquiry into ocean policy to our state. It is appropriate that we are gathered here, in the Last Frontier, to consider the Next Frontier: America's oceans.

It is my pleasure to welcome the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy to Alaska. We appreciate the journey you undertook to get here, and we hope your visit is productive and inspiring.

The Commission on Ocean Policy includes a distinguished Alaskan, Ed Rasmuson, a third-generation Alaskan long involved in the development of our fisheries and the prosperity of Alaska's coastal communities. Ed's father, Elmer, was the first chair of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, and I am glad Ed is continuing that tradition of leadership.

Today, I want to discuss Alaska's relationship to our magnificent oceans and the need for a new national policy regarding America's oceans.

Alaska's oceans are a vital part of life in the 49th state:

- Alaska has more coastline - 44,000 miles - than the rest of the United States combined.
- We are bordered by three seas - the Bering, Chukchi and Beaufort - two oceans - the Pacific and the Arctic - and the Gulf of Alaska.
- Alaska produces roughly half the seafood landed in the United States - some years more - and some 75,000 Alaskans receive all or part of their income from commercial fishing and seafood processing.
- Sport fishing supports over 10,000 jobs annually.
- And of foremost importance to many Alaskans is the subsistence harvest of fish, marine mammals, shellfish and other resources. The Tlingit people have a saying that echoes throughout Alaska's coastal villages: "When the tide is out, the table is set."

It is an honor to be here today to help tell Alaska's story before the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, a distinguished and accomplished group of leaders. The work you are doing to strengthen our nation's stewardship of ocean resources is vitally important.

The Pew Oceans Commission - of which I'm proud to be a member - is also taking on that challenge, with an emphasis on sustaining the productivity and diversity of the ocean's living resources.

There are strong working relationships among members of the two commissions. Pew Oceans Commission Chair Leon Panetta has conferred with Admiral Watkins, chair of this commission. And, I was very pleased that Bill Ruckleshaus and Andy Rosenberg joined us in Monterey earlier this year for a workshop on ocean governance.

I know you also heard in San Pedro from Pew Commission members Julie Packard, Pietro Parravano, and Dr. Charles Kennel.

I am certain the work of the Pew Commission will be helpful to your deliberations. Our two commissions are looking at some of the same concerns: coastal development, pollution, commercial fishing, and governance of our oceans.

All of the scientific evidence we are gathering will no doubt bring us to many of the same conclusions. I believe it is essential that, whenever possible, we be mutually supportive in our recommendations in order to realize the reform and restoration we know is so urgently needed.

The health of America's oceans is in peril.

- Pollution from cities and farms finds its way into the oceans, and has already created a 12,000 square mile "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Oil running off our streets and driveways reaches our oceans in amounts equal to an *Exxon Valdez* spill — 10.9 million gallons — every eight months.
- Persistent Organic Pollutants - or POPS – produced world wide are now condensing in Arctic waters. Through bio-magnification they are an ever increasing danger each step up the marine food chain, with the highest concentration of these substances in the mother's milk of indigenous peoples dependent upon subsistence foods.

- Half of America's population already lives along our coastlines and that's projected to increase to 75 percent over the next two decades. Our scientists say this increased development "will impair water quality in coastal streams and can damage coastal wetlands that are vital nursery grounds for many marine species."
- Fisheries, devastated by over harvesting, are limited by habitat destruction and wasteful bycatch in their ability to recover. Ocean pen farmed fish pose a growing threat of disease, pollution, and invasive and genetic threats to wild stocks.
- Governance is fragmented at best and often hopelessly grid locked.

This is just some of the growing evidence that mandates the urgent need for institutional reform and repair of our oceans, rivers and coastline.

We know the status quo is not acceptable. Future generations will judge us on whether we shoulder our responsibility.

It is time for America to unequivocally declare a national policy to protect, maintain, and restore the health, integrity, and productivity of our oceans by adopting a National Oceans Policy Act.

This act - modeled after efforts such as the National Forest Management Act - will be our compass for managing and preserving one of our nation's most valuable and immense assets - America's 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone - covering an area 1½ times the size of the continental United States.

This National Oceans Policy Act must develop policy that would be binding on all activities affecting United States Ocean waters and resources. It would require federal and state agency actions and programs to be consistent with the purposes and policies of the Act. It should provide clear standards against which performance can be measured and a mechanism through which compliance can be assured.

The policy must establish a governance system that would protect, maintain and restore marine biological diversity. It should manage activities on an ecosystem basis. It would utilize the best available scientific, social, and economic information for decisions. It should support the needed and necessary research and education in improving the understanding of marine ecosystems. Finally, it must be a governance that is equitable, transparent, and accountable as it balances the legitimate interests of federal, regional, state and private stakeholders.

The development of a National Oceans Policy Act has a solid foundation of visionary accomplishment on which to build. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is the single most significant conservation law dealing with America's oceans. I am proud that Alaska's senior senator, Ted Stevens, who will address this Commission today, had the foresight and dedication to contribute so much to sustain our fisheries and marine resources.

When you look closely at the record of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, one of the eight panels created under the Magnuson – Stevens Act, I think you will agree with me that it has the best record in America when it comes to sustainable management of the individual fish species.

Alaska is also proud to be at the forefront of ocean science and research. The University of Alaska's marine science programs, the Gulf of Alaska Ecosystem Monitoring program, and the North Pacific Research Board are cornerstones of that foundation.

Alaskans also realize that the oceans know no political boundaries. The 1996 Sitka Salmon Summit and the successful Pacific Salmon Treaty agreements in 1999 forged a renewed conservation commitment among Alaska, the Northwest states and tribes, and the Canadian government.

Our shared principles are clear - conservation, research and stewardship for wild Pacific salmon. Among the benefits were two funds, one an endowment and the other we call the Sustainable Salmon Fund, to support research, conservation, and enhancement of the fisheries themselves.

The story of our wild salmon is told in the rivers and in the ocean waters of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone and beyond.

Lt. Gov. Fran Ulmer, as chair of the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission, led a successful international effort of cooperative salmon research in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. She's been a great leader in fisheries conservation and development.

We know we must increase our National commitment to ocean research. Scientists inform us that today we know more about the surface of the moon than we do the bottom of our oceans.

Here in Alaska, researchers are studying deep water corals that appear to be important fish habitat and are very slow to recover when damaged by fishing gear. In addition, a recent publication by NASA and NOAA scientists reported that

phytoplankton – the microscopic marine plants that form the foundation of the marine food chain, declined in the North Pacific Ocean by over 30 percent since the 1980s.

We cannot manage for sustainability on an ecosystem basis without increased resources for research and management that answers these questions.

Our common challenge is to summon the leadership in Washington and across the country to attain the long-term goal of sustaining the oceans that sustain our businesses and our people.

One hundred years ago, Theodore Roosevelt used the power of the presidency to protect the nation's heritage of great open spaces: Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon.

At the Pew Ocean Commission's meeting in New York City, Theodore Roosevelt IV spoke of the need to extend our conservation ethic to the sea. He called for new connections between "our heritage of past leadership and our goals for today's leaders, what is required of this generation as we prepare the way for the next."

It was nearly forty years ago that astronauts looked at our planet from space for the first time. Startling images sent back by these pioneers showed our earth as the blue planet with three-quarters of its surface is covered by oceans.

Our responsibility is to make sure the blue planet stays blue and that the next frontier remains a place of great beauty and great abundance.

Thank you.