

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation

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Admiral James D. Watkins (USN-Ret.)

Chairman

U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy

1120 20th St. NW, Suite 200 North

Washington, DC 20036

October 17, 2002

Dear Admiral Watkins,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy on issues relating to NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program. As Trustees of the private, non-profit National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, we strongly support the work of the program and ask that the Commission address four key areas of concern, which include policy, funding, system expansion and governance. Our recommendations are encapsulated below, and followed by additional background information and documentation. We look forward to being of assistance to the commission, and would be happy to be available through our Executive Director, Lori Arguelles, at any time.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The National Marine Sanctuary System remains severely under funded and should, at a minimum, be funded at the authorized level of \$40 million for operation and \$10 million for construction. However, this minimum level is, in our view, still egregiously inadequate. Serious consideration should be given to significantly increasing funding for this program. As you will see in our analysis below, we believe \$400 million would be a more appropriate annual funding level, especially when system expansion is accounted for.
- 2) The moratorium on new sanctuaries must be lifted, and serious consideration to the creation of additional sanctuaries must be undertaken. Areas for consideration should include the east coast, and the Gulf of Mexico.
- 3) The National Marine Sanctuary Program should be given greater authority to use innovative management techniques, such as marine zoning. Implementing such policy changes would allow the NMSP to (actually) manage sanctuaries as ecosystems, with a strong science-based approach.
- 4) The governance structure within NOAA for the National Marine Sanctuary Program should be changed to allow the Program to have a more direct impact on communities and with its partners at the local, state and federal levels. Therefore, we strongly recommend the NMSP be elevated to 'line office' status within NOAA, making it equivalent to the Fisheries and Weather Services.

BACKGROUND

As you know, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF) was established in July of 2000 to promote greater awareness and understanding of the nation's federally managed marine sanctuary system. Stretching from the Florida Keys to the Hawaiian Islands, the shore of Lake Huron to the Gulf of Mexico, marine sanctuaries conserve, protect and enhance the bio-diversity, ecological integrity and cultural legacy of these special waters. The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation supports the outreach and education efforts of the National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP), part of the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

This nationwide network of 13 'underwater parks' currently encompasses over 18,000 square miles of marine and freshwater resources. With relatively modest funding, the Sanctuary Program has demonstrated how this Nation can conserve its ocean bounty while sustaining local and regional economies. The NMSP has been a leader in science, research, exploration and education. Among other things, sanctuaries serve as living laboratories, fixed areas of marine ecosystems that are monitored, inventoried and enjoyed by the public.

For the last 30 years the NMSP has served as the Nation's leader in managing special ocean areas. It serves as the first line of defense for marine conservation. Without the work of the NMSP over these last 30 years, many of the most treasured areas of our oceans could today be lost or seriously diminished. The NMSP is the only program with the mandate to protect the oceans like the National Park Service protects the land. However, the NMSP is often unable to fully implement the mandates set forth by Congress in the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) for a variety of reasons.

The relationship between the NMSP and the NMSF provides a new and unique framework for creating public-private partnerships designed to raise visibility and funds to support the outreach and education efforts of the sanctuary system. The NMSF Board of Trustees appreciates the opportunity to make recommendations to the US Ocean Policy Commission, especially relative to the National Marine Sanctuary Program and the National Marine Sanctuary Act.

POLICY

We believe the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should recommend that the NMSP be responsible for developing or fully implementing policies to protect our nation's rich marine heritage. Our country first made this commitment on land more than 100 years ago when it established Yellowstone National Park. Since that time, our country has been a leader in establishing terrestrial areas that have truly become part of the fabric of our society. These areas not only protect places like Yosemite and the Grand Canyon for future generations to enjoy but they also serve as cornerstones for the multi-billion dollar tourism industry – the leading economic industry in this country and the world.

Marine Zoning

The US Ocean Policy Commission should recommend that the NMSP be recognized as the premiere management model for ocean protected areas. We further recommend that the NMSP be authorized to implement existing policies and develop new policies that demonstrate in the ocean the type of commitments we have made on land. Specifically, we recommend that the NMSP be empowered to use marine zoning as a primary management tool to identify areas that need special protections. As you know, marine zoning is an adaptive management technique that scientifically determines which resources need to be protected and what polices are needed to meet the management objectives. These include, but are not limited to, ecological reserves (often referred to as marine reserves or fully protected areas), vessel traffic zones, no anchoring areas, personal watercraft zones, and research only areas. The NMSP

currently uses all of these types of marine zones in one or more of its sanctuaries. Finally, we recommend that when the NMSA is next reauthorized, that Sec. 301 (b) (8) be amended to include marine zoning.

Sanctuary Advisory Council Model

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should endorse the NMSP's policy of direct public participation and its use of Sanctuary Advisory Councils. This community-based management approach represents a fundamental re-thinking of how the public can participate in the decision making process. No other federal program uses a group of public representatives that represent the full range of interested stakeholders in advising the sanctuary on how to best manage sanctuary resources.

Programmatic Efforts

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should support a comprehensive set of sanctuary directed activities that are necessary and appropriate to implement the programs mandated by Congress. Examples of these activities include science and educational expeditions like Sanctuary Quest that bridge regional ecosystems; local partnerships like the Tall Ships Festival that help bring an areas cultural heritage to life; and a telepresence program that will bring the underwater world to life on land for those that are unable to peer beneath the waves at the wonders below.

FUNDING

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should recommend that the NMSP be fully supported to meet its mission of resource protection. Growing demands on the resources, increased expectations of stakeholders and Congress, and increased management require additional resources. For example, the land-based equivalent of the NMSP—the National Park Service—currently receives approximately \$2.9 billion in appropriated and directed funding that translates to approximately \$22,300/square mile of area managed (National Academy of Public Administration, Protecting Our National Marine Sanctuaries Report, 1999). In comparison, the NMSP \$34.5 million budget translates to approximately \$1,900/square mile. If one includes the 150,000 square miles encompassing the proposed Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Marine Sanctuary, the amount drops to only \$230/square mile.

As the NMSP celebrates 30 years of resource protection and grows dramatically in its science, education and management, the needs of the program and what is expected of it have changed dynamically. Although in recent years there have been incremental funding increases, the increase has never met the level of need as the program matures.

New management plans call for greater research, monitoring and educational growth. As each site goes through this management cycle, increased expectations for funding follows. An increased science requirement translates into more boats, staff, and associated project expenses. Requirements for educational programs also require more funding to help bring the sanctuaries to life through increased signage, visitor centers, and volunteer programs. If this Nation is to reap the rewards of good ocean management, the investment must be made to bring the NMSP to funding level necessary to meet its mandate.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should recommend that by fiscal year 2005, the NMSP should at least be appropriated at a minimum \$40 million for operations as authorized by the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (16 U.S.C. 1431 Et. SEQ., as amended by Public Law 108-513) and \$10 million for construction as called for in the President's FY 2003 budget request.

Over the long-term, the requirements to manage, operate, and develop public facilities for the NMSP will increase substantially. The program is currently begun a process to publicly review and revise all 13 sanctuary management plans. Initial input by the public, elected officials, and other government agencies to this management plan review process indicate that the science, educational, and management

requirements placed on the program will increase. This will necessitate building visitor facilities (*see* Market Analysis and Interpretive Strategy for the NOAA National Marine Sanctuary System), acquiring new vessels (*see* Small Boat Requirements Study, FY2003-FY2013), improving the science capabilities (*see* Sanctuary Science: Evaluation of Status and Information Need), and increasing the operational capabilities to meet the program's new mandates.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should recommend that by fiscal year 2012, the NMSP should be appropriated at the level of \$400 million. This funding level would account for the additional capabilities at existing sites noted above, as well as account for additional sanctuaries, (up to a doubling of the current 13-site system). This increase is based on historical precedents. In 1991, the NMSP budget for six sites was \$3.1 million. In 2002, the NMSP budget for 13 sites was \$34.5 million, representing a ten fold-increase. In another ten years, the NMSP budget should reflect an additional ten-fold increase to \$400 million, which will address the needs of both existing and new sites.

SYSTEM EXPANSION

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should recommend that new sites be explored for sanctuary designation. We believe it is critical that additional sanctuaries are considered to protect coastal and ocean ecosystems while we still have the opportunity to preserve areas that are relatively pristine. Many marine areas of extremely important ecological value are not protected especially along the East Coast and the Gulf of Mexico. Specifically, this includes supporting the sanctuary designation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

The NMSP has been restricted from looking at bringing on any new sites. This embargo has does not allow the program to adequately fulfill its responsibility to the nation as mandated in the National Marine Sanctuaries Act "to identify and designate as national marine sanctuaries areas of the marine environment which are of special national significance." Establishing additional sanctuaries is critical to sustaining our nation's marine wealth. How can we take seriously a comprehensive ocean policy without looking at new areas in need of management for future generations to enjoy?

We believe the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should recommend that Section 304 (F) of the NMSA, which limits designation of new sanctuary sites, be stricken from the Act. This embargo should be lifted in recognition of the significant changes in the program and the changes of the resource needs over time. This NMSP must be given the ability to grow and to explore opportunities for additional sites.

GOVERNANCE

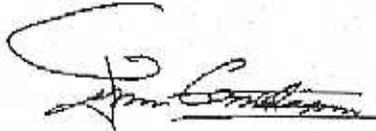
The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should recommend that the NMSP be elevated to a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) line office level that is equivalent to the Fisheries and Weather Services. Unless this program is elevated to a level commensurate to the responsibilities the program is entrusted with, it cannot fulfill the expectations of Congress and the American public. The NMSP currently rests under layers of organizational structures that do not serve to support or enhance the program. Because of this, it is difficult for it to interact with other Federal agencies like the National Park Service, state partners and others.

Elevating the program to the NOAA office level creates opportunities for the NMSP to work cooperatively with its fellow offices of the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research. These Sanctuaries can become the true NOAA laboratories for research, monitoring and exploration. Further, the site-based program can build its regional presence through partnerships with fellow NOAA offices and work locally to represent the NOAA mission.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 30 years, the NMSP has grown into a nationwide network of underwater treasures. In the next 30 years, the NMSP has the opportunity to even more fully serve the American public by investing further in the management and protection of their special ocean places. Empowering the NMSP with the recommendations noted above will significantly improve the program's ability to accomplish its mission. Now is the time to allow this program to come into its own, to build local and regional partnerships, and to provide this nation with a recognizable system of ocean areas that represent America's ocean treasures.

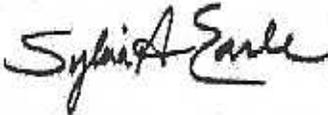
Sincerely,



Jean-Michel Cousteau



Terry Garcia



Sylvia Earle



Pat Romanowski



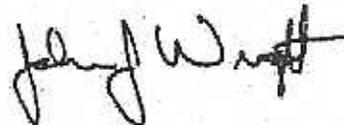
Robert Lyn Nelson



Kym Murphy



Jim Tulip



John J. Wright