

U.S. COMMISSION ON OCEAN POLICY



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Contact:
David Roscow
703/276-2772 x21

Chairman of U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Commends President Bush On Initial Step Toward a National Ocean Policy

Washington, DC--- Today Commission Chairman, Admiral James D. Watkins, USN (Ret.), met with President Bush in the Oval Office, where the President signed an Executive Order establishing a new Committee on Ocean Policy within the Executive Office of the President. Following the meeting Admiral Watkins indicated that his preliminary assessment is that the President's "U.S. Ocean Action Plan" represents a promising first step toward the implementation of a comprehensive national ocean policy.

"President Bush's response to the Commission's Report, *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century*, and his signing of Executive Order establishing a Secretarial-level Committee on Ocean Policy within the Executive Office of the President, sets into motion the important process of developing and implementing a new national ocean policy. The President has spoken of the need for fundamental change in core government operations, and we hope that his Plan will extend this vision to our nation's oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes," said Admiral Watkins.

Admiral Watkins went on to say; "However, given the detailed nature of the President's Plan, additional time is needed to review its contents. We need to understand how the Plan addresses the multitude of recommendations made by the Commission as well as the availability of funding to support these activities. I anticipate having more to say about the response early in the new year."

The Commission's Report highlights the serious problems facing our nation's marine environment and its resources. The report offers over 200 recommendations that, taken collectively, offer a strategy for promoting multiple uses and balancing competing stakeholder interests in our nation's oceans, coasts and Great Lakes.

The new Committee on Ocean Policy will be instrumental in guiding the implementation of the Commission's recommendations for changes in ocean and coastal related governance," continued Admiral Watkins. "The President's continuing leadership and a serious commitment to funding are essential in setting the course for a new national ocean policy. This policy is needed to move the nation toward an ecosystem-based management approach, reversing the continuing degradation of these economically, ecologically and aesthetically valuable resources."

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Admiral Watkins also emphasized the need for immediate and dramatic change in the science supporting ocean management, and the education of students and the general public about the importance of an ocean stewardship ethic.

Admiral Watkins also emphasized the importance of the Administration and Congress working together to build on the President's initiatives. "I am confident that ocean and coastal issues will be identified as a national priority when the 109th Congress convenes," said Admiral Watkins. "With a clear mandate from the President, and strong, bipartisan support among Members of Congress, we can begin the difficult, but critical process of implementing a comprehensive national ocean policy. However, success in this endeavor will require the cooperation and support of nongovernmental organizations, industry, and public citizens with an interest in the nation's oceans, coasts and Great Lakes."

With respect to the future of the Commission, the Admiral stated: "While the Commission will cease to exist as a government entity on December 19, 2004, my fifteen fellow Commissioners and I will continue to work to educate the nation about our Report and monitor the implementation of our recommendations.

We thank the President, the Congress, and the American people for their support throughout the Commission's work. We are heartened that Americans are talking about the report and recognize the importance of addressing the serious problems confronting our oceans, coasts and Great Lakes. As evidenced by legislation introduced in Congress and the President's announcement today, our nation's political leadership is responding with prompt attention. We look forward to continuing to work together with the public and our political leaders in implementing a comprehensive national ocean policy."

Mandated by the Congress through the Oceans Act and appointed by the President, the Commission conducted the first comprehensive review of U.S. ocean policy in 35 years. The Commission began its work in September 2001, conducting a series of 16 public meetings and 18 site visits in every coastal region of the country and the Great Lakes to learn firsthand about the most pressing issues facing the nation regarding the use and stewardship of ocean and coastal resources.

An electronic copy of the Final Report, summaries of the governors' and public comments, and the full text of the governors' comments are available on the Commission website, www.oceancommission.gov.