

## Ocean Policy on Agenda for New Congress

1/12/05

Last week, the 109th Congress convened and new members were sworn into office. As the session picks up steam, expect to see more action on various pieces of ocean/coastal legislation. This new legislation will come on the heels of the report issued last year by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Bush Administration's response to that report. The 108th Congress had quite a few ocean related bills introduced and many of them will likely be reintroduced in this session. As more and more members take the time to review the White House's response to the Ocean Commission's report, legislation may be introduced that will call for the adoption of more, if not all, of the Ocean Commission's recommendations.

Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Ranking Member of the House Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans Subcommittee, recently issued the following statement about ocean policy and the President's Action Plan: "While it seems like the president is leaning in the right direction with his Ocean Action Plan, I am disappointed that it is broadly written and does not contain a specific mandate of long-term conservation of our oceans and marine resources." Pallone added, "The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy recommended dramatic changes to our system of ocean governance, and we need to have the political will to make necessary reforms." Rep. Pallone is also a co-chair of the House Coastal Caucus.

Funding remains a central issue with the findings of the Ocean Commission. The Bush Administration has not called for new oceanic funding (with the exception of \$2.7 million for coral reef protection efforts) and the commission calls for a doubling of funds for research and protection. Members of the House Oceans Caucus plan on introducing the Oceans-21 bill which implements many of the Ocean Commission's recommendations. The Oceans 21 bill covers all of the funding requests of the commission.

The 109th Congress will also see various efforts to reauthorize the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Also, Rep Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) has reintroduced his NOAA organic act that will codify this agency (HR 50). On the Senate side, new Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (R-AK) may introduce legislation that would establish a national oceans and atmospheric policy. The bill was reported out of committee last year (S. 2647 was sponsored by Sen. Hollings of South Carolina). Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) may also introduce her own ocean policy bill.