

U.S. Gets a D+ on Ocean Policy Reform Nation's Oceans and Coasts Key to Competitiveness

More Than a Year after Reports of U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission, Bipartisan Report Card Shows Little Limited Progress, but Opportunities Exist

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Washington, DC – Opportunities still abound for fundamental changes to protect and restore our nation's oceans and coasts, according to the bipartisan Joint Ocean Commission Initiative with the release of its U.S. Ocean Policy Report Card, which gives the nation a D+ on ocean policy reform.

“It's no secret our nation's oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes are in serious trouble,” said Admiral James D. Watkins, co-chair of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. “This Report Card highlights our concerns about the slow rate of progress toward implementing the necessary reforms and very limited funding support, which jeopardizes the rare opportunity our nation has to make fundamental changes in ocean policy before it is too late.”

One year after the release of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy's historic report and more than two years after the release of the Pew Oceans Commission report, some progress on ocean policy reform has been made. However, hundreds of recommendations suggested by the two Commissions have not been addressed.

“We greatly appreciate the efforts to date of the Administration, the Congress, and a growing number of coastal states, but we feel strongly these actions are proceeding at a pace that does not reflect the urgency of the situation,” said the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, co-chair of the Initiative. “Our goal is to inform policymakers and the public of critical challenges facing our oceans, while identifying the many opportunities that are ripe for action.”

While recognizing that efforts are being made at many levels, the lack of progress in implementing new measures is reflected in the Initiative's U.S. Ocean Policy Report Card, which assesses the initial reaction to the Commissions' report and also assigns grades for actions in 2005. The results were a GPA a little over 1.6, or a letter grade D+. The following were the grades given in each subject area:

- Initial Response to Commission Reports A-
- National Ocean Governance Reform D+
- Regional and State Ocean Governance Reform B-
- International Leadership F
- Research, Science, and Education D
- Fisheries Management Reform C+
- New Funding for Ocean Policy and Programs F

The Report Card also highlights where additional efforts by Congress, the Administration, states, and nongovernmental stakeholders are necessary and where opportunities for improvements exist in each of the subject areas.

Under national ocean governance reform, the Initiative encourages Congress and the Administration to improve decision-making, promote more effective coordination and integration of ocean programs, and enable implementation of an ecosystem-based management approach. This needs to incorporate improved leadership at the national level, as well as a strong role for regional, state, and local decision-makers.

The Report Card recognizes that progress is being made in a number of regions, including the Great Lakes, Gulf of Maine, Gulf of Mexico, Puget Sound, and the Northeast, and at the state level in states like California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Alaska, Hawaii, and Washington. However, more regions and states need to develop and implement ocean governance mechanisms, and the federal government should develop a national framework to support regional approaches and collaboration.

In the area of international leadership, the Initiative urges the Senate to expeditiously provide advice and consent for U.S. accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The convention has the support of President and the majority of Congress and is vital to U.S. national security, economic, and international interests.

In keeping with the President's State of the Union address, which called for stronger science and education, the Report Card urges the Administration and Congress to immediately begin the process of enhancing support for ocean research, including support for social sciences, as well as using oceans to help attract students at all levels to pursue careers in science, engineering, and math.

Regarding fisheries management reform, the Initiative calls upon Congress to pass and the President to sign a bill to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act that is consistent with the Initiative's principles, including: strengthening provisions to ensure that the best available science is used to make conservation decisions; ecosystem-based management; fallback provisions; and dedicated access privileges.

As for funding, the Initiative calls new and sustained investments key to the success of ocean policy reform. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy identified the costs associated with each of its 212 recommendations, which would require new funding on the order of \$3.9 billion per year to be shared among the states, tribes, and federal government. Key among those costs is the doubling of the federal ocean and coastal research budget (\$650+ million) over the next five years, building an integrated ocean observing system, and the establishment of an Ocean Policy Trust Fund.

“The health and wealth of our oceans and coasts are key to our country's competitiveness,”

said Watkins. “We must unify our nation with a common goal of protecting and restoring our ocean and coastal ecosystems so that they will continue to be healthy and resilient and able to provide the goods and services that people want and need.”

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission to catalyze ocean policy reform. The Initiative is guided by a ten-member Task Force, five from each Commission, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins and the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, chairs of the U.S. Commission and Pew Commission, respectively. The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform. For more information about the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, visit www.jointoceancommission.org.

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