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U. S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
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Thank you Chair Cantwell. And thank you Ranking Member Snowe and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you this morning to discuss the President's Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force.

As you know, the oceans cover more than 70 percent of the planet's surface and are critical to our survival. These bodies of water provide about half of the oxygen we breathe, drive weather patterns and have a major impact on our climate. Nearly half of our population is located in coastal counties. We rely heavily on the oceans for a number of activities including fishing, tourism and energy development, to name a few. Our rich and productive coastal regions and waters account for the majority of the national economy – totaling trillions of dollars each year.

The United States has been a leader in exploring and protecting the oceans. As we research and monitor the ocean ecosystems, we have come to realize why it is so important to protect this critical resource. We have reduced overfishing, made great strides in reducing coastal pollution, and helped restore endangered species and degraded habitats. But we also recognize that demands on the oceans, our coasts, and the Great Lakes are intensifying, spurred by population growth, migration to coastal areas, and economic activities.

Traditional and renewable energy development, shipping, aquaculture, and emerging security requirements are examples of new or expanding uses expected to place increasing demands on our ocean resources. To ensure that the Federal Government is effectively achieving its stewardship responsibilities and responding to the growing demands and uses of these resources, the President established the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force in June of this year.

The Task Force was charged with developing recommendations that included a national policy for the stewardship of our oceans, our coasts and the Great Lakes, a framework for improved Federal policy coordination, and an implementation strategy to meet the objectives of a national ocean policy within 90 days. We submitted our Interim Report on September 10th, and the report was made available for public comment, with comments requested by October 17th. The Task Force was also charged with developing a recommended framework for effective coastal and marine spatial planning within 180 days.

The Task Force, which I chair, comprises 24 senior-level policy officials from across the Federal Government. Because of its wide range of members representing interests throughout the Federal Government, the Ocean Policy Task Force has been able to include input from agencies with a natural focus on the oceans like NOAA, the Coast Guard, and Department of the Interior. But at the same time, it includes agencies like Labor and Health and Human Services – who have a less traditional, but also critical stake in the national policy developed around this resource. Because science is the foundation of the National Policy, science agencies such as the National

Aeronautics and Space Administration and the National Science Foundation were also very involved.

Across the Task Force membership there is a clear recognition of the importance of what the President has asked us to achieve. I am happy to report that the level of commitment and participation by all those represented on the Task Force has been outstanding and I would especially like to recognize my colleagues that are here today – Dr. Lubchenco, Admiral Allen and Laura Davis for their leadership on the Task Force.

Public Engagement

The Task Force has undertaken a robust public engagement process to hear from and involve stakeholders and interested parties. We have held 38 expert roundtable meetings, six regional public meetings, and received more than 3,400 comments on our website. Our public engagement efforts have directly involved thousands of Americans in the development of our recommendations for the President.

The 24 expert roundtables regarding the national ocean policy included representatives from sectors including: energy, conservation, science, recreational fishing and boating, commercial fishing, transportation, agriculture, human health, States, tribes, and local governments, ports, business, and national and homeland security. In addition, the Task Force has hosted 14 additional expert roundtables to inform its development of a recommended framework for coastal and marine spatial planning. Several Task Force or Working Committee members attended each roundtable. There was robust participation, and the Task Force received many valuable comments and perspectives for its consideration during each session. Through these expert meetings, we engaged approximately 700 interested stakeholders and private citizens in the work of the Task Force.

The Task Force has received thousands of comments through the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Ocean Policy Task Force (OPTF) website from a range of affected and interested parties, including academia, citizens, commercial interests, non-governmental organizations, and States, tribes, and regional governance structures. We released the Task Force's Interim Report for 30-days of public comment and received over 1,800 comments. We anticipate releasing the second phase of work, proposing a framework for marine and coastal spatial planning, also for public comment later this year.

The Task Force also hosted six regional public meetings in Anchorage, Alaska; San Francisco for the West Coast Region; Providence for the East Coast; Honolulu for the Pacific Islands; New Orleans for the Gulf of Mexico Region; and Cleveland for the Great Lakes Region. The Pacific Islands meeting was virtually and interactively connected to several Hawaiian Islands and to Guam, American Samoa and to Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The Gulf Coast meeting connected all five Gulf Coast States live and interactively through the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Learning Centers.

There were three ways to participate in each of these meetings: live at the site (or satellite sites); by telephone; and by webcast. These meetings were located in key regions with distinct interests

in the development of a national ocean policy and framework for coastal and marine spatial planning.

These meetings were very well attended – over 2,000 people signed in at the public meetings, nearly 1,800 logged onto the webcasts, and hundreds used our call-in line to participate. This robust engagement provided the Task Force with excellent input and a real flavor of the diversity of the regional challenges, issues, and opportunities facing our oceans, coasts, and the Great Lakes.

The Interim Report

On September 10th, the Task Force sent President Obama an Interim Report addressing the first three charges from the President. The report was made available for public comment on September 17th, with comments requested by October 17th. This Interim Report proposes a comprehensive national approach to uphold our stewardship responsibilities and ensure accountability for our actions. We believe that it outlines a more balanced, productive and sustainable approach to our coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes resources. It contains proposals for a national policy, a robust governance structure and categories for action that the federal government will prioritize. Let me briefly walk through those key recommendations.

A National Policy

The Interim Report proposes a new National Policy, based on sound science, that recognizes that America's stewardship of the oceans, our coasts, and the Great Lakes is intrinsically and intimately linked to a wide set of intersecting and overlapping equities – environmental protection and sustainability, human health and well-being, national prosperity, adaptation to climate and other environmental change, social justice, foreign policy, and national and homeland security.

The Interim Report outlines a vision of oceans and coasts that are healthy and resilient, safe and productive, and understood and treasured. And it provides – for the first time in our Nation's history – a comprehensive statement of our National Policy and a set of overarching guiding principles for U.S. government management decisions and actions affecting the oceans, our coasts, and the Great Lakes.

A Robust Governance Structure

The Interim Report recommends modifications to the existing governance structure, the Committee on Ocean Policy, which was first created by Executive Order 13366 (2004) under the prior Administration. We received much input recommending that the structure could and should be strengthened – by providing a stronger mandate and policy direction to the agencies, more effectively linking science and management, and by ensuring renewed and sustained high-level engagement.

The Task Force is recommending a new structure, an interagency National Ocean Council, led by CEQ and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). The Interim Report calls for the creation of a Governance Advisory Committee to improve coordination with State and local

authorities, tribes, and regional governance structures that have emerged over the last several years and where so much innovation and early leadership has been demonstrated. These steps, combined with sustained high-level staff involvement, would ensure that these areas become, and remain, a high priority throughout the Federal Government.

Categories for Action

Finally, the Interim Report prioritizes categories for action to address some of the most pressing challenges facing the oceans, our coasts, and the Great Lakes. Four of the categories for action relate to improving how the Federal government does business. These are: (1) Ecosystem-Based Management; (2) Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning; (3) Inform Decisions and Improve Scientific Understanding; and (4) Coordinate and Support (Federal, State, tribal, local, and regional management of the oceans, our coasts, and the Great Lakes).

In addition, the Task Force proposed five priority areas of special emphasis – substantive areas of focus that we felt deserved renewed and sustained attention from the federal government. These are: (1) Resiliency and Adaptation to Climate Change and Ocean Acidification; (2) Regional Ecosystem Protection and Restoration; (3) Water Quality and Sustainable Practices on Land; (4) Changing Conditions in the Arctic; and (5) Ocean, Coastal, and Great Lakes Observations and Infrastructure.

One of the areas of particular importance relates to the changing conditions in the Arctic. Increased human activity in the area is bringing additional stressors to the Arctic environment, with serious implications for Arctic communities and ecosystems. In fact, global climate change has already had an appreciable impact on these communities. As the Arctic system changes with climate change, the pressures for increased development of living and non-living resources and for increased commerce and transportation will only grow.

This August, I had the privilege of traveling throughout Alaska with a number of Task Force members to meet with local communities and see firsthand the challenges and opportunities emerging in an increasingly accessible Arctic region. The common observation that we came away with is that the U.S. Arctic region — including its native peoples, its environment and its resources — is a true national treasure, but a vulnerable one.

We also recognize that overlaying all of this, we must implement this policy and these areas of emphasis consistent with the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention. Accession to this vitally important treaty would allow the United States to participate more effectively in the interpretation and development of the convention, including with regard to the changing realities of the global marine environment. As a Party, the United States would have access to procedures that would allow us to maximize international recognition and legal certainty over our extended continental shelf (likely extending at least 600 nm off Alaska).

Next Steps: Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning

Moving forward, the Task Force is now focusing its efforts on developing a recommended framework for effective coastal and marine spatial planning. We are seeing greater demands across the board – from offshore energy, both non-renewable and renewable, increased shipping,

recreational and commercial fishing, and the desire for offshore aquaculture. These demands create stress on an already stressed environment, increased conflicts among ocean users, greater demand for use and occupancy of ocean space, and greater need for conservation. Numerous scientists, policy experts, Congress, and others have emphasized the need for ecosystem-based management; looking more holistically and across legal jurisdictional boundaries to conserve and sustainably use our marine environment. To do so requires us to move away from an uncoordinated, sector by sector, or stove piped approach to more integrated marine resource management.

States such as Massachusetts, California, and Rhode Island have stepped out in front on this issue over the last few years, as well as have a number of foreign governments, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Norway. The Task Force is looking at these examples and listening to experts in science, policy, and law, State, regional, and tribal representatives, and numerous stakeholders. Themes the Task Force has heard include that coastal and marine spatial planning must be proactive and integrated, ensure broad stakeholder participation, be adaptive, allow transparency, provide incentives for participation, avoid new layers of bureaucracy, and be done in partnership with States, regional governance structures (e.g., Gulf of Mexico Alliance, West Coast Governors' Alliance, Great Lakes Commission, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on Oceans, South Atlantic Governors' Alliance, and Northeast Regional Ocean Council) and tribes, as appropriate.

The Task Force is working with these ideas as it develops the recommended framework. This framework would only be a first step in any development of coastal and marine spatial planning. Coastal and marine spatial planning is intended to incorporate these ideas and allow for a more coherent approach to how we manage oceans, coasts, and the Great Lakes to achieve sustainable economic, environmental, and social benefits now and in the future. Coastal and marine spatial planning has been defined a number of ways, but some of the key themes include that it is a transparent, proactive, adaptive, forward-thinking, and integrated planning approach for the use of marine space.

I expect the Task Force to further these ideas in the framework. However, while the framework will provide the foundation for coastal and marine spatial planning in the United States, much will be left to be developed among federal, state, regional, and tribal partners from the bottom up, to ensure their interests, along with those of stakeholders and the public, are included in any planning process.

Upon completion of its next report, we intend to issue it for 30 days of public comment, as we did with the Interim Report. We look forward to hearing from the public, and continue to welcome any input the committee, its members, or your colleagues in Congress would like to provide.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning and I look forward to your questions.