



# The Ocean Observation System Coalition

## Legislative Update April 4, 2006

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### **Seventeen Senators Sign Letter Requesting \$138 Million for IOOS in FY '07**

Senator Snowe (R-ME) and Senator Cantwell (D-WA) led an effort to get Senators on record for the first time requesting a top line budget for the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). The letter was addressed to Senator Shelby (R-AL) and Senator Mikulski (D-MD), the Chair and Ranking Member respectively for the Senate Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Appropriations Subcommittee that has jurisdiction over the NOAA budget. See page 2 for a list of the Senators who signed the letter and frequently asked questions about the content and impact of the letter.

### **Coalition Presents \$138 M IOOS Funding Request to CJS Appropriations Staff**

Representatives from the Regional Coastal Ocean Observing Associations from the west coast, Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of Alaska, southeast Atlantic and the northeast Atlantic met in early March with Rachelle Schroeder, the new clerk on the Senate Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS) Appropriations Subcommittee, to present the FY '07 \$138 million funding request for IOOS. Participants in the meeting gave an overview of IOOS, described the need for enhanced ocean observations to address unique coastal issues in their regions, and pressed for a transition away from earmarks to an IOOS program line as encouraged by Congress in report language in the FY '06 CJS approps bill last year. The message back from Rachelle is that Senators will need to be vocal in their support for IOOS in what is shaping up to be another tight budget year.

### **NOAA Tells Congress that there is \$700 M in the FY '07 PBR for IOOS**

NOAA submitted to Congress in late February 2006 a budget summary showing that the President's FY '07 Budget Request (PBR) for NOAA contained just over \$700 million in funding for the Integrated Ocean Observing System. The \$700 million buildup lumps large sections of the NOAA budget under the IOOS umbrella including \$287 million in NMFS programs and \$33 million in NESDIS programs for DMAC. The \$700 million IOOS buildup represents a discouraging movement by NOAA to re-label ongoing activities as IOOS versus working to establish IOOS as a new initiative.

### **Time Running Out for House Resources to Move IOOS Authorization Bill**

There are very few working days remaining this election year in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress and the House Resources Committee still has not moved forward with the IOOS Authorization bills pending with the Committee. IOOS supporters in California are working to bring the IOOS legislation directly to House Resources Committee Chairman Pombo (R-CA) in an attempt to raise the visibility of the issue with the Congressman. If nothing happens in the House by May 1, the Coalition will pursue a strategy to attach provisions of the IOOS bill as amendments to other legislation that has a better chance of passing yet this year. We believe that most elements of the IOOS legislation can move in this manner, except for the IOOS funding authorization.

## Seventeen Senators Sign IOOS Funding Request Letter

Getting Senators to come forward in support of a top line budget request for IOOS was an essential step in the process to transition from earmarks to a base line budget for IOOS. Appropriations committee staff have commented for the past three years that Senators and Representatives ask for their parochial interest items related to and included under IOOS, but no one was asking for the IOOS program itself. The Senate letter in support of \$138 million for IOOS is the first time that Members of Congress have gone on record in support of the IOOS program, which was a major goal for the Coalition. A copy of the letter is attached at the end of this newsletter. The 17 signers include:

Snowe (R-ME)	Cantwell (D-WA)	Levin (D-MI)
DeWine (R-OH)	Collins (R-ME)	Lott (R-MS)
Smith (R-OR)	Kerry (D-MA)	Sarbanes (D-MD)
Lautenberg (D-NJ)	Menendez (D-NJ)	Lieberman (D-CT)
Wyden (D-OR)	Dodd (D-CT)	Boxer (D-CA)
Kennedy (D-MA)	Reed (D-RI)	

Seventeen signatures is a respectable number for such an appropriations request letter. It is customary that Senators who sit on the Appropriations Committee decline to sign such letters. They consider the request letters to be letters to themselves. Several Senators from coastal states are on the Appropriations Committee and were therefore unlikely to sign. Sen. DeWine is the lone Appropriations Committee member on the above list.

There are some notable regional gaps in the above list of IOOS supporters. Not a single Senator from the Southeast signed the letter. Alaska and Hawaii are not represented. Only one Senator from the Gulf of Mexico region signed on. The IOOS letter will need to go around again before final Conference Committee consideration of the NOAA FY '07 budget and we hope to pick up Senators from these regions who either didn't have enough time to consider signing the letter (at least two Senate offices wanted to sign but couldn't get approval before the letter closed) or who didn't understand how IOOS related to ongoing ocean and Great Lakes observing initiatives going on in their states.

## FAQs on the Senate Letter

### Why does the letter use ICOOS versus IOOS?

The FY '07 letter started with the IOOS acronym. The sponsors for the FY '07 letter on the Hill determined that because NOAA submitted to Congress a buildup showing \$700 million was in the FY '07 NOAA budget already for IOOS, the letter couldn't go forward requesting only \$138 million for IOOS. The ICOOS acronym was used instead of IOOS to differentiate the \$138 million request from NOAA's IOOS budget buildup.

### What is the breakdown of the \$138 million?

The letter avoids breaking down the \$138 million and highlights the elements of IOOS identified by the Ocean Commission. The purpose of the letter was to focus on the top line budget request for IOOS, which is a first and has been missing in previous appropriation rounds.

What Happens Next with the Letter?

The Coalition will work over the next few weeks to follow up on the letter with the Chair and Ranking Members of the Senate CJS Appropriations Subcommittee and other high ranking Senators on the CJS Appropriations Subcommittee. We will encourage the members of the Subcommittee to move away from earmarks and establish an IOOS program line.

Will there be a similar letter circulated in the House?

The Coalition has no plans at this time to circulate an IOOS appropriations request letter in the House. In general the House has been less supportive of IOOS (and NOAA) than the Senate. We struggled to get 17 signatures in the Senate and we do not believe that we could generate a compelling number of signatures on a House letter.

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 22, 2006

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice  
and Science  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice  
and Science  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Senator Mikulski:

We are writing to request your assistance in including \$138 million in the Fiscal Year 2007 Commerce, Justice and Science appropriations bill, to restore and increase funding for the Integrated Coastal Ocean Observing System (ICOOS) and the regional ocean observing associations under NOAA's National Ocean Service, and to expand associated ocean observation programs throughout NOAA. We greatly appreciate your leadership and support for this valuable initiative.

Ocean observing is the essential first step to improving understanding, prediction and forecasting, stewardship, and use of the oceans, Great Lakes, and coastal waters. Deployment and operation of an integrated and sustained ocean observing system will: (1) improve the safety and efficiency of marine operations, (2) improve prediction of natural hazards (including tsunamis and storm surges) to reduce resulting damages and costs, (3) improve predictions of climate change and its socio-economic consequences, (4) improve national security, (5) reduce public health risks, (6) help protect and restore healthy ecosystems, and (7) sustain and restore living marine resources. Immediate returns are expected in maritime safety and efficiencies for shipping, fishing, energy, tourism, and other industries; search-and-rescue; national security; and monitoring and clean-up of discharges and spills in ocean and Great Lakes waters.

The FY06 CJS Conference report included language promoting a transition to a single integrated ocean observing program line. A funding level of \$138 million will maintain support for existing ICOOS programs while seeking greater uniformity in ocean observation capacity among all regional associations operating in coastal regions and the Great Lakes. This request is consistent with the recommendations of the U.S. Ocean Commission and will promote critical objectives including: (1) the data communications and management system to connect information from regional observing networks to federal and state agencies; and (2) infrastructure and operational support for regional associations to manage and deliver ocean data products to user groups. While this funding would support existing ICOOS national data integration and related ocean observation efforts across NOAA, NOS could also utilize a competitive grants process to allocate portions of this funding to regional associations, thereby ensuring that the American public receives the greatest return for its investment in the form of a nationally consistent system for useful ocean data, reliable forecasts, and timely warnings.

Chairman Shelby and Senator Mikulski  
March 22, 2006  
Page 2 of 2

The United States and the world are facing critical decisions about the future stewardship and management of the oceans and fresh water resources including the Great Lakes. Improved data resulting from ICOOS and the regional associations provide crucial information to support these decisions. We urge you to provide a full \$138 million for these programs in FY07.

Respectfully,

	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	