

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.

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,


































