

John Orcutt, Chair of SCCOOS BoG

17 April 08

Dear John,

After the bad news of our failure to win NOAA funding for SCCOOS, we had an unusually productive ESC meeting that points to taking some action before the SAC and BoG meetings.

Alerted by your query about putting users on the BoG, we considered how to make better use of the advice of users. We find

(A) The involvement of users, particularly government agencies, in the BoG is fraught with legal and ethical complexities and, as we understand it, this is no longer the preferred model for RCOOS governance for this reason.

(B) The SAC is populated with the important users from various sectors, some of whom are eager to help SCCOOS be useful. Greater representation of the fishing, fisheries management, and marine-life conservation sectors would make it better matched to our present program.

(C) We have received advice from only one SAC meeting and have tried to use it to alter the course of our program. Our adaptation to this advice was apparently poorly devised because it was the most harshly reviewed part of our failed NOAA proposal.

(D) Some SAC members expressed pleasure that their advice was being sought through an informal structure rather than within a legalistic, formal one.

(E) We heartily endorse making better use of the SAC by involving it with the BEC and ESC in dialogue. The SAC is probably too big to involve the whole committee this way, so we suggest selecting a subset or executive group from the SAC that can be involved with the ESC and BEC.

(F) The ESC is where day-to-day decisions are made, it operates as a consensus forming group that advises the BoG, and (unlike the BoG/BEC) there are no rules on who can be members. We think these factors make the ESC a potentially productive place to involve the SAC leadership. Users could be members of the ESC.

(G) We are now trying to develop for you a list of users, preferably SAC members, who seem to be interested in helping SCCOOS work. George Robertson and Steve Weisberg come to mind immediately.

Concerned by two successive failures of our NOAA proposals, we began reviewing our strategy and its implementation. First, we tried to draw some advice from the reviews. Some thoughts follow:

(1) Both this year's and last round's NOAA reviews complained about our organization (not enough federal PIs, not enough guidance from users, not well enough integrated with other federal efforts). We interpret this as partly (a) resistance to our original chartering structure that differed from the old Ocean.US model), (b) a new push to integrate us with other federal efforts (not a bad idea, but not what we have been designing to), and (c) a failure to communicate the philosophy/strategy we have used to become ready to meet users' needs (focusing on observable fields that were of interest to many users). We have no answer for (a), are not even sure (b) is a

general trend, and are ready to work with the BoG and SAC on the proper balance of changing our thrust and improving our communication.

(2) There was a perceived lack of priority setting in our program. We advanced four areas of work: (a) water quality and HABS; (b) the impact of climate variability on ecosystems, evaluation and assessment of MPAs, and on the coastline; (c) assisting spill response and search-and-rescue with Bight-wide surface current mapping; and (d) use of SCCOOS data by the general public. Perhaps we should not have included (d) about which little positive was said; (c) is an area where the feds believe they are providing the coordination and is a spin-off from (a) and (b). We presently feel that WQ/HABs and Climate/Ecosystems are both critical efforts and do not want to eliminate either. Perhaps more importantly, we failed to explain our strategy of looking for a suite of observable variables that can be combined inside a data assimilating model to produce water-property and velocity maps of use to many users. Our priorities were on a few observable fields helpful for many users, not a few key users.

Related to (b), we did not focus strongly on MPA evaluation and assessment in our NOAA proposal, because we did not know how to address these issues based on what we measure. CenCOOS did focus on MPA's and were successful so we will study their proposal to learn more about possible approaches. Given that MPA's are soon to come to the SCCOOS region, we need to re-examine how we can aid planners and managers in this process. We also will engage BoG and SAC members who can help us formulate a strategy for informing the overall MPA process in Southern California. Clearly we need BoG advice since we have apparently been doing the wrong things and we need to become more effective in communicating what we do.

(3) Our observational/data-management results were not strong enough to garner the reviewers' appreciation. In part this was because there were not noteworthy results from all performers. This raises an important question about the mechanism we use to let performance feed back into future resource allocation. As a consensus body made up mainly of participants, the ESC is poorly suited for the review function. Eric is in a better position to judge performance, but is a performer too and has no authority to over-ride the consensus of the ESC. BoG, we have a problem!

Since a failure to succeed with NOAA has increased BoG scrutiny of SCCOOS procedures, I think it would be a good idea to have the BoG or BEC engage in a dialogue with the ESC about our real objectives, strategies and procedures. Before everything gets redesigned, we would like the redesigners to know what the ESC has been trying to do.

Russ Davis. ESC Chair