



Ed Welch, Chair
Matt Wellslager, Deputy Chair

December 16, 2011

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
Washington, DC

Dear Dr. Lubchenco:

The Hydrographic Services Review Panel (HSRP) conducted its semiannual meeting October 25-27, 2011, in Norfolk, Virginia. Thirteen of the 15 HSRP members were present, including all 11 individuals that you appointed or reappointed at the beginning of this year.

We were pleased that NOAA's leadership was represented by your Chief of Staff, Ms. Margaret Spring, who provided a luncheon keynote speech, and Dr. Holly Bamford, Deputy Assistant Administrator of the National Ocean Service, who spoke about NOS' leadership vision for the HSRP. Both Margaret and Holly actively participated in the various HSRP events, including the reception on and tour of NOAA's new Survey Vessel *Ferdinand R. Hassler*.

At the conclusion of the meeting, HSRP members chose new leaders for the next two years. Mr. Matt Wellslager of South Carolina (the current Vice Chairman) will be the new Chairman. Mr. Scott Perkins of Kansas will serve as Vice Chairman.

Panel members had the privilege of spending several hours on site at CO-OPS' Engineering and Field Operations Division facility, Chesapeake, Virginia, and observed how NOAA's oceanographic and meteorological water level instrumentation systems and sensors are designed, tested and put into operation. HSRP members also participated in an offshore tour of the ports of Hampton Roads aboard the NOAA Research Vessel *Bay Hydro II*, where they observed NOAA's use of mutli-beam and side scan surveying technologies that support a safe and efficient marine transportation system.

Responding to NOAA leadership's challenge, the HSRP engaged in a facilitated strategic planning session, ably led by Mr. Gary Magnuson of the National Ocean Service. As a result of this process, the HSRP agreed to a Work Plan for advising on NOAA's navigation and hydrographic services for fiscal 2012-2014. The broad topics of priority work are:

1. Budget challenges and optimization of resources;
2. Program Improvement;
3. Outreach; and
4. Emerging issues, including Arctic issues.

The HSRP will use three smaller Working Groups, each of which will take responsibility for “fleshing out” the specifics of the HSRP work on each of the following topics:

1. Reauthorization of the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act;
2. Program Improvement, to include status of the PORTS system, sea level rise, and NOAA communication by social media; and
3. Arctic issues, to focus on infrastructure for navigation services and coastal and marine observations in that region.

As is traditional, the HSRP sought input from local stakeholders who use or benefit from NOAA’s navigation and hydrographic services and products. Several speakers emphasized how crucial the threat of sea level rise is to the lower Chesapeake Bay area (much of which is urbanized) and how valuable NOAA’s services and products are to businesses and local governmental jurisdictions that must plan for and adjust to the phenomenon. Incidentally, the dilemma posed by rising ocean levels is a “refrain” that the HSRP has repeatedly heard from local stakeholders from all across the country. It has come up at prior HSRP meetings from Baltimore to Providence to Honolulu. The critical importance of NOAA data to the sea level challenge hopefully is obvious to all members of the Panel; it is clear that this information, so critical for use by regional and local governments, can come only from the U.S. Government.

Captain Ashley Evans from the Office of the Oceanographer of the Navy emphasized how valuable NOAA hydrographic and navigation services are to mission of that branch of the U.S. military. Similarly, Captain Mark Ogle of the United States Coast Guard stressed the value of NOAA’s Navigation Services, particularly the hydrographic survey vessels and NOAA’s hydrographic science experts in providing sound information to assure him that it was safe to open the commercial ports of Hampton Roads after Hurricane Irene struck earlier this year. This was a consequential decision, because keeping the ports closed for too long would result in costs of \$112,000,000 per day, but a premature opening might lead to a vessel’s grounding, thereby obstructing the ports’ main channel for an indefinite period of time.

The ports of Hampton Roads accommodate the second largest volume of maritime tonnage on the East Coast, and they already have sufficient channel depth to receive the larger ships that will transit the expanded Panama Canal. Furthermore, they are the home location of the largest Navy base in the world. Consequently, when the federal and state governments began promoting the leasing of offshore areas of Virginia for commercial wind energy development, it was essential for coordinated ocean use planning to take place. The HSRP heard several presentations as to how this process, while not yet complete, has identified and resolved many potential conflicts. The

challenge of bringing a new ocean activity into a well-used coastal area such as off the mouth of the Chesapeake is a form of coastal and marine spatial planning. Such planning is not driven solely by environmental protection, as some both within and outside of the federal government mistakenly assume, because issues of safety, security, and broad economic considerations play a considerable part.

The Panel also heard a presentation from Steve Carmel, a member of the panel and shipping company executive, on the interaction between the commercial sector and Government in the Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning (CMSP) process. Central elements of the comments were that from an industry perspective, there does not appear to be any benefit from CMSP and that environmental concerns will always trump industry issues even when there is incomplete or inconclusive science driving the environmental position. Industry is not represented in any official way in the process, and it was noted that holding public meetings to which industry is invited should not be construed to be industry participation. Absent meaningful involvement, industry will continue to seek congressional intervention, which cannot be good for the intent of the CMSP process.

HSRP members believe it is important for the Administration to seek reauthorization of the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act. Currently, the authorization expires at the end of the year 2012. Seeking reauthorization of the Act would send a signal to Congress and the maritime industry that NOAA's commitment to its navigation and hydrographic responsibilities remains strong.

As noted, the HSRP has chosen Arctic issues as one of its main topics of emphasis over the next two years. Accordingly, the next HSRP meeting will be in Anchorage, AK, on May 22-24, 2012. Perhaps you will be able to be present there.

On a personal note, it has been my privilege to serve as a member of the Hydrographic Services Review Panel for the past four years. Panel members are dedicated and hard-working and are committed to providing NOAA with recommendations based on their collective knowledge and experiences in science, academia, and the commercial maritime industry. I urge NOAA to continue to support a robust Hydrographic Services Review Panel as a complement to its mission of providing navigation and hydrographic services to the nation's citizens.

Sincerely,



Edmund B. Welch
Chairman, Hydrographic Services Review Panel, 2010-2011
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