




Dana S. Skidmore
Secretary of State

May 19, 2004

The Honorable Gary Locke
Governor of Washington State
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Locke 

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the recent Preliminary Report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. The Department of Natural Resources is very supportive of the recommendations in the report. The report provides a map to improve the health of the 2.5 million acres of aquatic lands owned by the citizens of our state and that the department is charged with managing. We have focused our comments on a few select recommendations in the comprehensive report.

Increasing federal efforts and funding to address coastal water pollution (Chapter 14) is our highest priority. We strongly support the recommendations in this chapter especially the call for increased capital funding to address the need for long-term infrastructure investments for modernizing wastewater treatment plants and storm water systems, and the recommendation to provide greater technical, institutional and financial support for reducing non-point sources of pollution. Also important is the reduction of pollution from vessels (Chapter 16); the recommendation for incentives and increased funding for pump out stations is needed in many areas of our state.

It was disappointing that the report did not call for providing new funding to the Superfund. The lack of Superfund dollars delays clean up of highly toxic material pending resolution of lengthy legal processes to determine who will pay for the remediation of contaminated sediment sites on aquatic lands. The Department of Ecology has identified over 100 contaminated sediment sites on aquatic lands in Washington resulting in risks to human health and the health of marine species such as killer whales.

Increased federal effort to prevent the spread of invasive species (Chapter 17) is also a high priority for the state's aquatic lands. The state is currently spending millions of dollars on controlling invasive species.

Increased federal support of aquaculture (Chapter 22) is also a priority for Washington. The aquaculture industry is an important component of many rural economies.

The report understates the need and nature of local involvement needed. Many of the actions called for in the report require implementation at the local level. There needs to be specific attention given to providing state and local entities (especially local watershed planning groups) with the resources to connect with efforts to improve ocean management (Chapter 9). Finally, the model of Marine Resource Committees authorized by the Northwest Straits Initiative provides a model to bring a "grass roots" approach to the process in marine waters. The current structure of Marine Resource Committees is limited to northern Puget Sound. Additional federal funding is needed to create similar organizations in the rest of the state and to provide resources for state and local agencies to interact with the Regional Ocean Councils. We support the call for strengthening the linkage between managing coastal waters and watersheds. Salmon recovery planning demonstrates that efforts in watersheds and coastal waters must be integrated for success.

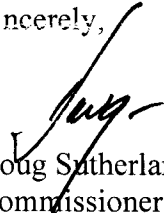
Increased federal funding for science is also needed especially in the expanding science and technology in many areas (Chapter 25). New technology for improving water quality from point and non-point sources and improved scientific understanding of the nearshore processes to address salmon recovery needs are two of many needs to address improving the health of our oceans.

I am also very supportive of the call for enhanced public information especially through the mechanism of increasing public access to the ocean and bays combined with displays of information on ocean issues.

Lastly, the recommendation for improvement of coordination between the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is important (Chapter 20.) The Department's effort to develop a response to the listing under the Endangered Species Act is at risk due to a lack of staff at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment through your office on the Preliminary Report of U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy.

Sincerely,



Doug Sutherland
Commissioner of Public Lands