

Tom Skinner, Chair
Edmund Welch, Deputy Chair

May 29, 2009

Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D.
Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Room 6217
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Lubchenco:

The Hydrographic Services Review Panel (HSRP) held its first meeting of 2009 in Baltimore, Maryland, on April 14 – 15, and was very pleased at some of the progress being made by NOAA to address critical unmet hydrographic needs. The HSRP greatly appreciates your role and that of key NOAA staff to ensure increased funding for these services, including hydrographic surveys, the Physical and Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS), capital investments, contracted services, and the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS).

In addition to a number of informative NOAA programmatic updates and a detailed briefing by Deputy Under Secretary Mary Glackin, our panel heard from a variety of hydrographic user groups during our stakeholder panel session. Regional stakeholder panels, convened over the last several years at each HSRP meeting, have become one of the most insightful portions of our work, providing real-life examples and recommendations of how NOAA's hydrographic services benefit a wide spectrum of users, ranging from local, state, and federal agencies to nonprofit organizations, shipping and boating interests, and large manufacturers and other corporations. Each stakeholder panel has validated our recommendations (*HSRP Most Wanted Hydrographic Services Improvements*, May, 2007), with an overall message that these high-quality services are important for navigation, commerce, manufacturing, ecological restoration, hazards avoidance and remediation, and climate change, with recommendations largely centered on unmet needs that could be addressed with additional hydrographic data and services. While the HSRP has been impressed with what NOAA has been able to do with limited financial resources, it is clear from what we have heard from these stakeholder panels that modest increases in hydrographic funding will greatly enhance our nation's capacity to conduct a wide variety of commercial, scientific, public safety, and other societal activities.

At our Baltimore meeting, the HSRP heard from a seven-member panel, consisting of the following users and their affiliations:

- Captain Eric Nielsen, President, Association of Maryland Pilots
- Frank Hamons, Deputy Director for Harbor Development, Maryland Port Authority
- Keith Bailey, Maryland Society of Surveyors
- Stuart FitzGibbon, American Sugar Refining, Inc., Domino Sugar Corporation
- Steven Golder, Chief Survey Team, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore
- David Nemerson, Conservation Biologist, Baltimore Aquarium
- Captain Brian Kelley, USCG Captain of the Port, Baltimore

Once again, the excellent presentations that were made re-affirmed our five recommendations included in the *HSRP Most Wanted Hydrographic Services Improvements* report. Within the context of our report, the HSRP offers the following comments and recommendations based on the panelists' comments and the other briefings and discussions we had at the Baltimore meeting.

Implement improvements recommended by the Baltimore stakeholder panel

In addition to describing what services they used, the HSRP asked each stakeholder panel for recommendations on how to improve the hydrographic services NOAA provides.

- Based on this input, the HSRP recommends that NOAA:
 - Work closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on survey standards and datums, to improve the efficiency of our national hydrographic programs;
 - Establish standards and a hydrographic surveyor certification process so that private sector surveys may be used on NOAA charts;
 - Improve “user-friendliness” of hydrographic products, to encourage more widespread use of this information and a broader understanding of its utility; and
 - Provide funding for infrastructure, modeling, and staff to increase the frequency and accuracy of forecasts and predictive trends.

Require and fund accurate hydrographic data for all habitat restoration projects funded by NOAA

Good hydrographic data is critical for successful habitat restoration projects and the panel heard from David Nemerson about the use of this data for several projects in the Chesapeake Bay area. Given the fact that NOAA is awarding up to \$167 million for habitat restoration projects as a result of funding in the American Recovery and Revitalization Act, vast amounts of accurate hydrographic data, including height modernization, Grav-D, and VDatum, will be required to ensure the long-term success of these restoration efforts.

- HSRP recommends that all habitat restoration projects funded through NOAA use appropriate hydrographic information that has been collected and verified to NOAA standards, and that NOAA take steps to ensure it has the personnel, funds, and capacity to provide this information, especially for height modernization, Grav-D, and VDatum.

Establish a budget line item for PORTS and increase its funding

The HSRP has long advocated for the expansion and full federal funding of the Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS[®]) program, and a federal network of PORTS remains an HSRP goal. An impediment, however, is the fact that thus far NOAA has not created within the President's proposed budget a NOAA line item for PORTS. Over time, Congress has demonstrated its desire for PORTS by inserting funding into annual appropriations acts and we believe it is time for NOAA to step up to the plate on behalf of PORTS by proposing budgets that have a regular line item for PORTS. In addition, we note that it would require only a modest increase in annual federal appropriations to implement a nationwide federally funded PORTS program.

- The HSRP recommends that NOAA create a budget "line item" for PORTS in each proposed presidential budget, and to continue advocating for increased federal funding for this program.
- If NOAA is unsuccessful in obtaining increased funding for PORTS through a line item in the President's budget, we recommend that NOAA examine an interim process to cost-share, based on an established funding formula, to encourage a more rapid expansion of the PORTS program that will lead to full federal funding of a nationwide PORTS system.

Continue Improvements to the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS)

The IOOS program has made considerable progress in coordinating ocean data collection and management efforts and focusing the regional component of IOOS on national missions. We appreciate that waves will now be included into PORTS and that the High Frequency Radar (HFR) will be incorporated into the Coast Guard's Search and Rescue system.

- Based on this input, the HSRP recommends that:
 - NOAA integrates additional IOOS observations taken by the Regional Associations into PORTS;
 - IOOS continues to work on the fielding and implementation of the surface currents through HFR into navigation services; and
 - Regional Associations continue to provide outreach and products/services (e.g., the Los Angeles/Long Beach project) to the Marine Transportation Sector.

Seek Non-Traditional Supporters of Hydrographic Services

All of the members of the Baltimore stakeholder panels provided informative presentations that were of great assistance to the HSRP. However, we believe this meeting was the first at which a representative of a major non-transportation corporation described in detail how the corporation used NOAA's hydrographic services on a daily basis, and the degree to which this information was critical to the corporation's operations. Stuart FitzGibbon, from the Domino Sugar Corporation, explained how its installation decides whether to continue operations or shut down temporarily (a decision which entails hundreds of thousands of dollars of revenues and/or costs) by consulting

NOAA-produced hydrographic data, such as predicted water levels and temperatures, tides, and storm surge. It was an extraordinarily compelling argument, and one that is probably not unique, though rarely heard. While other uses of hydrographic information are equally important, few of them are as well understood or appreciated by the general public as a sizeable, local industry, making a well-known product.

In addition, the Port of Baltimore's representative, Frank Hamons, explained how the existence of the local PORTS is an integral part of its marketing to potential customers. He also explained that the Port of Baltimore puts NOAA's hydrographic charts to the non-traditional use of preliminary identification of suitable sites for dredge material disposal; because of its inland location, the Port of Baltimore's economic viability depends upon an extensive program of maintenance dredging and associated dredge disposal.

- The HSRP recommends that other similar manufacturers or industries that depend on hydrographic data be identified nationally and encouraged to provide feedback on the utility of those services as well as possible recommendations for improvement.

Build Upon Stimulus Funding Obtained in the American Recovery and Revitalization Act

The HSRP commends NOAA and the U.S. Congress for using economic stimulus funding by designating \$40 million to be used for beginning to address the hydrographic charting backlog and \$20 million for repair and maintenance of NOAA's research and exploration vessel fleet. The HSRP acknowledges that hydrographic functions had to compete with other NOAA programs for economic stimulus funding, so it is gratifying to see that NOAA's leadership recognizes that hydrographic functions create private sector jobs rapidly and stimulate the national economy.

- The HSRP urges NOAA to take advantage of any future economic stimulus funding opportunities for hydrographic services and to incorporate the economic stimulus characteristics of hydrographic functions (including private contracting) in setting its traditional fiscal year budgeting priorities.

The HSRP has benefitted from and appreciates the commitment of top NOAA officials to participate in its work. Assistant Administrator John H. Dunnigan's personal commitment to attend each HSRP meeting is greatly appreciated and dramatically demonstrates this commitment. We also appreciate the other NOAA officials who have met with the HSRP, including Mary Glackin and Paul Doremus, and very much hope that you will be able to arrange your schedule to be a part of a future HSRP meeting.

We look forward to working with you and your team at NOAA and hope this information is useful. Please let us know if there are specific topics that you would like the HSRP to examine.

Sincerely,

Tom Skinner, Chair
Hydrographic Services Review Panel

cc: Mary M. Glackin, Deputy Under Secretary for Ocean and Atmosphere
Paul N. Doremus, Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator and Director Strategic
Planning, Office of Program Planning and Information

DRAFT