



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
Washington, D.C. 20230

December 16, 2022

Ms. Julie Thomas
Chair, NOAA Hydrographic Services Review Panel
Senior Advisor, Coastal Data Information Program
and SCCOOS
Scripps Institute of Oceanography
9500 Gilman Drive, No. 0214
La Jolla, CA 92093

Dear Ms. Thomas:

Thank you for your letter, as well as the priorities matrix and recommendations, on behalf of the Hydrographic Services Review Panel (HSRP) following your public meeting in Oahu, Hawaii, on September 20-22, 2022. Although we have demonstrated we can host successful virtual meetings when necessary, I am confident reconnecting in person was meaningful for and appreciated by those who attended this HSRP meeting.

As you note in your letter, and as Paul Scholz and the NOAA Navigation Services Office Directors shared following the meeting, your agenda covered a wide range of topics important to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), including the status of the North American-Pacific Geopotential Datum of 2022; our progress on water levels and currents; our efforts to establish public-private partnerships; and our implementation of multi-purpose mapping projects and platforms. With respect to those platforms, I am also focused on NOAA fleet recapitalization and our dependence on aging survey vessels to fulfill our mapping missions. In fact, I recently spoke at the United Nations' Climate Change Conference (or COP27) about Seabed 2030 and the importance of collecting bathymetric data, both of which would be enhanced in the United States by the recapitalization of NOAA's fleet.

In addition, I appreciate the HSRP Coastal Resilience issue paper and its call for NOAA to play a more proactive and lead role in aiding coastal states and local communities as they address the immediate and long-term threats of climate change – including increased flooding, coastal erosion, storm surges, and sea level rise – by investing in coastal hydrographic services and accessible predictions and products. The FY 2023 Biden-Harris proposed budget will allow NOAA to scale our efforts to deliver accurate climate products and services to all Americans by building on our research, forecasts, and observations and to support the Climate Ready Nation. [Climate Ready Coasts](#) (CRC) are funded for \$1.467 billion over five years and will help coastal communities build the future they want to see, investing in natural infrastructure projects that build coastal resilience, create jobs, store carbon, remove marine debris, and restore habitat. Although there are limited CRC investments in NOAA's Navigation Services Programs, we are looking for ways to incorporate Navigation Services capacities into CRC activities as resources allow.

THE ADMINISTRATOR



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I have reviewed the HSRP's advice and the seven recommendations you listed in your letter, and I will consider incorporating them as appropriate going forward in NOAA's operations.

The President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Budget Request includes some increases directly relevant to NOAA Navigation Services, the New Blue Economy, and "Providing Foundational Ocean and Coastal Mapping and Charting to Support Coastal Climate Resilience." In addition, NOAA's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funding includes unprecedented investments in coastal resilience.

With respect to the HSRP recommendations, I offer the following thoughts:

1. NOAA's core Navigation Services products and services are indeed critical, and not just for navigation, as your Pacific Islands stakeholder session confirmed. We will continue to focus on our geodetic and water level enhancements for safe navigation and port operations, underserved communities, coastal and estuarine stewardship, and many other purposes. For example, geodetic and tidal datum support provided to the He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve has enabled it to plan restoration and other resilience activities within an accurate geospatial framework. NOAA will also soon establish its first Pacific Islands Physical Oceanographic Real Time System (PORTS[®]) in Honolulu in partnership with the U.S. Navy. More broadly, NOAA will continue to build out its Precision Marine Navigation program to deliver high resolution bathymetry, surface currents and water level information in standardized formats for use in navigation systems and other applications.
2. NOAA is also committed to maintaining its mapping expertise and delivering high quality hydrographic data to our users in a timely manner. We will keep the HSRP informed of our continued efforts to recapitalize the fleet as we revalidate the NOAA Fleet Plan.
3. In advance of the spring 2023 HSRP meeting, NOAA will share for your review the draft Standard Ocean Mapping Protocol that is under development as part of National Ocean Mapping, Exploration, and Characterization Strategy (NOMECS) implementation. Recent U.S. laws and international conventions also dictate a need to make data interoperable and consistent with the U.S. National Spatial Reference System. This will aid in improving the accuracy of derived products from geospatial data obtained on different datums. The result will be improved coastal resiliency, inundation modeling and cost-effective hardening of coastal infrastructure.
4. Amending the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act (HSIA) would require an act of Congress. However, we continue to evaluate our contracting capabilities with our Legislative, Acquisitions and Grants, and General Counsel teams using case examples from the HSRP and National Geospatial Advisory Council. We will continue to update the HSRP on our findings and determinations. In addition, the Coast and Geodetic

5. Survey Act of 1947 and the Ocean and Coastal Mapping Integration Act of 2009 already enable partnerships of different types with Federal, state, local, industry, academia, and tribal entities to improve delivery of NOAA's navigation services and valuable datasets. Some examples include the Brennan Matching Fund, PORTS, Continuously Operating Reference Stations, our cooperative academic centers at the University of New Hampshire and the University of South Florida, and other community-based partnership opportunities.
6. Coastal resilience, coastal inundation, and sea level rise are key components of the NOAA FY22-26 Strategic Plan's first goal, which mandates providing science-based, use-inspired tools to decision-makers.¹ We look forward to delivering products to meet the needs of Americans in a changing climate and will keep the HSRP informed of our progress. NOAA's Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS) will improve methodologies for predicting and understanding the impacts of sea level rise, as well as apply these to real-time products like the NOAA Coastal Inundation Dashboard and longer-term high tide flooding projections. CO-OPS will continue to engage with partners and stakeholders to create a streamlined suite of tools and information to equitably provide valuable information to coastal communities.
7. NOAA concurs with the recommendation for dedicated leadership and coordination on NOMECEC Pacific mapping goals. The Pacific is vast, with many public, private, and academic mapping activities occurring in the region. As part of our NOMECEC involvement, we will continue to look for opportunities to assist regional mapping collaborations in the Pacific Islands – as we are doing in Alaska with Seascope Alaska and other regions. This type of local-to-regional coordination is intended to leverage all available mapping assets to ultimately acquire more data thereby minimizing mapping gaps.
8. As the leader in climate information and services, NOAA strives to reduce our carbon footprint where possible. We are discussing how to best capture the carbon footprint of the NOAA fleet and the footprint of contract assets. We will also provide progress reports to the HSRP on our goal for the NOAA Fleet to be carbon neutral by 2050.

¹ NOAA 2022-2026 Strategic Plan (www.noaa.gov/organization/budget-finance-performance/value-to-society/noaa-fy22-26-strategic-plan).

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Again, we appreciate your recommendations and the time and effort the HSRP puts into assessing NOAA's Navigation Services. These actions are vital for NOAA to provide the best available scientific information, tools, and services for sustainable economic growth and environmental stewardship as we work together to build a climate-ready nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Spinrad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" being the most prominent part.

Dr. Richard W. Spinrad
Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
and NOAA Administrator

cc: Sean M. Duffy, Sr., Vice Chair, HSRP