



## Marine Conservation Biology Institute Supports and Commends President's New National Ocean Policy

### Policy is Designed to Save America's Ocean Environment and Economy

**Washington DC.** Marine Conservation Biology Institute, which has helped to shape marine conservation worldwide, praises President Obama's new science-based, coordinated National Ocean Policy. The Policy was released in Executive Order – *Stewardship of the Ocean, Our Coasts and the Great Lakes* on July 19, 2010.

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#### *Statement of Elliott A. Norse, Ph.D., President, MCBI*

In recent months, Americans have been horrified by vast amounts of toxic, gooey oil spewing into our Gulf of Mexico, killing wildlife, devastating people in coastal communities and threatening ecosystems in a crucial part of America's oceans. In a time of unprecedented ocean peril, only visionary, scientifically sound, decisive action can solve our toughest problems. Today, President Obama took a major step to safeguard and sustainably use our oceans.

The President's Executive Order, changes how the USA will plan to manage our oceans. MCBI applauds President Obama for taking this bold step, after many months of listening to Americans' views on the draft Policy.

Implementation of the National Ocean Policy in the Gulf of Mexico might or might not have prevented BP's disastrous *Deepwater Horizon* well blowout and oil spill. But if a comprehensive ecosystem-based ocean plan had existed for the Gulf, we could be confident that:

- Critically important conservation areas, resources and human activities in the region would already have been identified in spatial plans designed to protect and sustainably use the sea.
- All major proposed uses and activities in federal waters, including every new oil drilling project, would have received careful scrutiny and required approval from a committee of federal, state, tribal and local officials, scientists and citizens, before any federal agency could permit such activities. This crucial check and balance system has been absent until now.

- No company or agency would be allowed to act in ways that are inconsistent with the ecological and economic goals of the National Ocean Policy and the regional coastal and marine spatial plans issued by the decision makers in each region. And...
- All of the key decision makers, experts and stakeholders in the region would have been meeting and talking frequently. In the event of an accident, clearly established lines of authority, trust and communication among officials in each region would save precious time and allow key players to direct resources quickly and efficiently.

Protecting America's vast ocean realm requires a sea change in the way the USA governs our oceans, as the *BP Crude Oil Disaster* shows all too clearly.

The National Ocean Policy, the first in the history of our nation, mandates:

- Regional coastal and marine spatial planning, with government agencies in the region coordinating with each other and hearing the wishes of scientists and the American people.
- Basing all decisions on how actions will affect our environment and economy, because Americans want and deserve both a healthy marine environment and economy. And...
- Strong citizen involvement in the decision making process.

Oceans are the biggest and, quite probably, the most important component of the Earth's life support system. They are essential for preventing devastating global overheating. They protect our shoreline from storms. They provide one-sixth of the animal protein people consume. They are the largest contributors to trade, recreational, real estate, and tourism values in the USA.

Under international law, the USA and all sovereign countries have jurisdiction over economic activities and natural resources out to 200 nautical miles (230 statute miles) from shore. US states generally have jurisdiction out to 3 nautical miles from shore.

Americans love our oceans because they have been very good to us. Oceans have shielded us from foreign aggressors, put food on our tables, provided high-quality recreation and carried our goods. Our coastal states, including both the Great Lakes states and DC, produce 83% of America's Gross Domestic Product. Coastal counties alone produce 38% of US GDP. More than half of US territory is ocean, a total area greater than that any other country.

But as leading marine scientists warn, our oceans are in deep trouble from overfishing, careless coastal development, pollution, alien species, global overheating and acidification. To save what we value, our country must manage our oceans more effectively than we have.

Now, for the first time, under the President's new policy, the USA will do coastal and marine spatial planning to determine which places are suitable for different purposes. We will comprehensively map biological resources and economic activities. Then scientists and citizens will use this information to advise our decision makers on how our oceans should be managed.

We'll have ecosystem-based, scientifically sound, economically smart, citizen-driven decision making, something both our best marine scientists and our founding fathers would approve of.

The National Ocean Policy and the coastal and marine spatial management it initiates for our nation is the best way to protect, maintain and restore the biological diversity and productivity of our oceans and coasts, helping America sustain a vibrant coastal economy.

We will do this not only in offshore federal and inshore state waters, from sea to shining sea, but in our Great Lakes, the five magnificent lakes of North America's heartland.

No sector will be exempt from complying with this new policy. Our country can no longer afford to give a pass to oil, to fishing, to agriculture, to the military, to any federal agency or federally permitted activity with major effects on our marine environment and economy.

President Obama's Executive Order confers authority for planning on responsible officials in nine major regions of US waters. A new National Ocean Council, composed of leaders of federal agencies with major ocean responsibilities and impacts, will establish the clear, strong standards for the nine regional efforts, oversee their progress and resolve disputes that might arise.

This comprehensive, forward-looking, integrated spatial approach to ocean management, involving all relevant federal agencies, inviting participation from all levels of government and depending on informed input from scientists and interested citizens, will end the ineffectual way we have governed our oceans. Until now, different activities in the same ocean places have been overseen by different agencies with little coordination. Too often the results haven't been good.

In the USA, over 140 federal laws apply to the oceans, and at least 20 agencies have ocean management responsibilities. Two national blue-ribbon ocean commissions identified lack of government coordination as a major reason why our ocean resources have declined, harming the interests of all Americans.

The President's comprehensive, coordinated National Ocean Policy provides our country's first unifying ocean vision, based on essential principles of marine science, economics and fairness. It creates a new, more effective, forward-looking system for governing America's ocean realm.

The USA now joins other nations having comprehensive ocean policies, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, France, Germany and China. And it is especially timely that our country is doing this at a time of national emergency caused by the *BP Crude Oil Disaster*.

President Obama's National Ocean Policy is a bold, innovative and visionary step towards stronger, smarter, anticipatory, responsive government for our oceans. By working together to plan our future actions, we will protect, maintain and restore America's unmatched ocean resources for present and future generations.

***Marine Conservation Biology Institute*** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the science of marine conservation biology and securing protection for the world's marine ecosystems. Founded in 1996, MCBI is headquartered in Washington State, with offices in California and Washington DC.