

NEWS

For Immediate Release
September 17, 2009



Contact:

Elliott Norse, Ph.D., President
(425) 968-0449; elliott@mcbi.org

MARINE CONSERVATION BIOLOGY INSTITUTE (MCBI) APPLAUDS NEW NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Washington DC. Today, on a historic day for our oceans, Marine Conservation Biology Institute strongly praised President Obama and the leaders in his Administration for issuing recommendations for a science-based national policy to govern the oceans, coasts and Great Lakes.

These recommendations were issued 90 days after the President's memorandum on oceans issued June 12, as promised. They give overarching guidance to federal agencies to protect, maintain and restore our nation's oceans and Great Lakes. This is unprecedented in US history, the first time we've had a common vision for governing the 4.4 million square miles of America's marine waters.

The USA has the world's largest area of ocean of any country, 25% larger than our land area. Under the United Nations Law of the Sea, sovereign states generally have jurisdiction over economic activities out to the 200 nautical mile (230 statute mile) limit of their Exclusive Economic Zones. Two blue-ribbon panels called for a national ocean policy earlier in this decade. The USA now joins nations that have already done so, including Australia, Germany, France, China, New Zealand and Canada. Other nations are likely to follow our example.

Within the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force Interim Report, MCBI is exceedingly pleased to see that it suggests a national ocean policy which would adopt a comprehensive and ecosystem-based approach to stewardship responsibilities within the oceans, coasts and Great Lakes. The Interim Report:

- implements adaptive management and elevates the precautionary principle as primary guide in decision-making;
- addresses the need for resiliency and adaptation to ocean acidification;
- advances public access to data and promotes ocean literacy;
- develops marine spatial management that will guide informed decisions on uses in the ocean, coastal and Great Lake waters;
- endorses US accession to United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
- establishes a Committee on Ocean Policy that incorporates science-based management and public participation.

Marine Conservation Biology Institute

Washington • California • Hawai'i • Washington DC • www.mcbi.org
2122 112th Ave NE, Suite B-300 • Bellevue WA 98004 USA • (425) 274-1180

“What the Obama Administration did today was bold, visionary and essential to the future of America,” said MCBI President Dr. Elliott A. Norse, who in 1993 was lead author of *Global Marine Biological Diversity: A Strategy for Building Conservation into Decision Making*, the most-cited book in marine conservation worldwide.

“Since we declared independence, the oceans have provisioned us, transported us and kept us safe from enemies. They were integral to our economy and national security in 1776, and, *thanks to this developing policy, will be when my grandchildren are getting old, in 2076*,” Dr. Norse said.

“We need a national policy because our oceans are in trouble,” Dr. Norse continued. “That has to change because people everywhere need healthy living oceans to continue on this planet. Today, for the first time, our country made healthy living oceans a high national priority. I’m glad to be alive on such a day,” said Dr. Norse, who began his professional career in marine conservation in 1978, 3 years after receiving his doctorate in marine ecology. He is a Pew Fellow in Marine Conservation and former President of the Society for Conservation Biology’s Marine Section.

“Before now there was no unifying vision, no set of bedrock principles to govern our oceans. Over 140 federal laws affect the oceans, and at least 20 agencies have key ocean responsibilities. Now we finally have steps towards a national ocean policy to benefit of all Americans, not just extractive users.”

“Until now, in America’s oceans, it was a Tower of Babel, a confusion of different agencies mandates, perceived constituencies and cultures,” Dr. Norse said. “Now our government is unified in a task that’s essential and urgent. This policy will be a model for what government should be: intelligent, concerned for the well-being of all Americans and striking the right balance between benefits now and in the future,” said Dr. Norse.

A strong national policy for the oceans, coasts and Great Lakes will help our nation rebuild over exploited fisheries, protect endangered species, restore vulnerable habitats, and develop measures to deal with ocean acidification, warming waters, and sea-level rise. It will also strengthen the nation’s economy by providing jobs, energy, food and our country’s leading place for real estate, recreation and tourism. According to the National Ocean Economics Program, the US ocean economy contributes more than \$180 billion to the nation's GDP annually just from living resources, tourism and recreation.

Comprehensive ecosystem-based marine spatial planning is a critical way a national policy will ensure that the USA maintains healthy, productive oceans while ensuring that uses are compatible with ocean health. “We are deeply pleased that the Obama Administration’s recommendations for a national ocean policy says, first and foremost, that we protect, recover and maintain the oceans’ biological diversity, integrity and resilience as the foundation for sound and compatible economic uses,” Dr. Norse said.

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 Bellevue WA, and has offices in Honolulu HI, Glen Ellen CA and Washington DC.

Marine Conservation Biology Institute

Washington • California • Hawai'i • Washington DC • www.mcbi.org
2122 112th Ave NE, Suite B-300 • Bellevue WA 98004 USA • (425) 274-1180