May 18, 2009

The Honorable Bart Gordon
Chairman
House Science and Technology Committee
2320 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Baird
Chairman
Energy and Environment Subcommittee
2319 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Gordon and Chairman Baird:

On behalf of the 93 members of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, I am writing to express our strong support for your efforts to establish a National Climate Service at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). A National Climate Service would vastly improve NOAA’s ability to gather and disseminate critical climate data, information and products. However, we have several serious concerns with the draft legislation and we hope we can work with your committee to rectify these issues to improve the bill.

It is clear that the oceans are a critical component of the climate system, storing and redistributing over 80% of the heat from global warming and up to 50% of man-made carbon dioxide emissions. Furthermore, the oceans are already experiencing the impacts from a rapidly changing environment (warmer and more acidic waters) that may have catastrophic impacts on marine ecosystems and our society which relies upon the oceans for food, commerce, and recreation.

Unfortunately, gathering data from the ocean and delivering information about the impacts from climate change to ocean and coastal resources are notably absent from the legislation. NOAA has a tremendous amount of assets that gather critical information from the 71% of the planet covered by ocean. The National Oceanic Data Center at NOAA serves as a national repository and dissemination facility for global oceanographic data that can be used for operational applications and climate research. Furthermore, the National Climate Data Center manages the world’s largest archive of climate data. The success of a climate service will require improved and sustained data from remote (e.g. satellites & radar) and in situ assets on the land (e.g. radar) and in the sea (e.g. buoys & moorings).

There are also many other critical ocean data gathered at other federal agencies that need to be part of a climate service including programs at NASA and the Departments of Energy, Interior and Agriculture. Additionally, the lack of specific authorizations in the legislation raise questions of how the budget authority for this initiative will be managed within NOAA or across the federal agencies. NOAA is already experiencing severe budget shortfalls threatening many of their long-standing programs. It is critical that we have an effective budget structure as well as a comprehensive architecture for building and maintaining the assets required to manage the flow of data into a climate service and out to stakeholders.

The sooner we recognize that climate is not merely an atmospheric phenomenon, the better we will be able to adequately grasp the complexities of the climate system including the global transfer of heat and carbon via the ocean and the implications of altered ice coverage and snow pack on both global and regional ecosystems. We look forward to taking the opportunity to help you strengthen this critical legislation as it moves to full committee and onto the House Floor.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

Robert Garstkan
President & CEO