November 22, 2013

Dear Chairwoman Boxer, Chairmen Shuster and Hastings, and Ranking Members Vitter, Rahall, and DeFazio:

With the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) conference negotiations now underway, the Consortium for Ocean Leadership urges you to consider the nation’s oceans and coasts in the process by supporting the National Endowment for the Ocean (NEO) and opposing any effort to halt ecosystem-based management and ocean planning activities.

The United States is an ocean nation, with more than 95% of the nation’s commerce travelling through American ports, more than $100 billion in annual seafood sales, and 2.7 million maritime activity related jobs. Current and anticipated changes in ocean chemistry, productivity and sea level will have tremendous regional and national economic impacts. The academic research community is critical to informed, efficient and effective solutions aimed at maintaining our ocean dependent economy.

Two provisions important to the ocean and coasts will be considered as part of the WRDA conference. The Senate-passed NEO would provide a vehicle for funding critical ocean science research. Fulfilling one of the major recommendations of the bi-partisan U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy appointed by President George W. Bush, NEO (Title XII to S. 601) would authorize grants to entities, including research institutions. In addition to restoration opportunities, this endowment would support the development of baseline science, monitoring, and observation necessary to answer questions about our marine resources and provide foundational information needed in marine policy decision-making.

The House-passed Flores rider would impede thoughtful, long-term minded management of the ocean by restricting such tools as ecosystem-based management and ocean planning. In the House-passed bill, Section 146 to H.R. 3080 seeks to remove options from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a key coastal and ocean management agency. By restricting the Corps’ ability to use ecosystem-based management and ocean planning tools, comprehensive views on both the marine system and the variety of uses of the resources are removed from the agency. Inhibiting coordination between the Corps and other federal agencies, scientists, and other stakeholders will result in weak and ineffective
management of our ocean resources that much of the economy depends upon. The necessity and benefit of close coordination between government agencies, academe and industry was amply demonstrated during Hurricane Sandy and the Gulf oil spill as essential for planning and managing coastal economies. Many states have already seen the value of coordinated, comprehensive approaches, including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Washington, and Oregon. Working closely with regional scientists to provide the necessary sound science foundation, these approaches highlight the best of local-state-federal government partnerships. Restricting the Army Corps’ ability to coordinate in this manner threatens the sovereignty of state-led ocean planning based on ecosystem approaches and hobbles the Corps’ efforts to increase coastal resiliency.

We strongly encourage all conferees to support our nation’s ocean-reliant economies through ocean science research and considered ocean management by including the NEO provision and striking the restrictions on ecosystem-based management and ocean planning from WRDA.

Ensuring that the ocean resource is able to continue supporting a strong economy is clear. It isn’t about politics; it is about the economy of today and tomorrow. On behalf of the nation’s leading public and private ocean research and education institutions, aquaria, and industry, I urge you to support the National Endowment of the Oceans and oppose the provision restricting ecosystem-based management and ocean planning in conference.

Regards,

Robert Gagosian
President & CEO

CC:
The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Tom Carper
The Honorable Ben Cardin
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
The Honorable John Barrasso
The Honorable Jim Inhofe
The Honorable Frank LoBiondo
The Honorable Sam Graves
The Honorable Shelley Capito
The Honorable Candice Miller
The Honorable Duncan Hunter
The Honorable Larry Bucshon
The Honorable Bob Gibbs
The Honorable Richard Hanna
The Honorable Daniel Webster

The Honorable Tom Rice
The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
The Honorable Rodney Davis
The Honorable Corrine Brown
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
The Honorable Timothy Bishop
The Honorable Donna Edwards
The Honorable John Garamendi
The Honorable Janice Hahn
The Honorable Rick Nolan
The Honorable Lois Frankel
The Honorable Cheri Bustos
The Honorable Rob Bishop
The Honorable Grace Napolitano