July 28, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Capitol
Office 221
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
U.S. Capitol
Office 230
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the 95 members of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, the 125 members of the National Association of Marine Laboratories and the 31 states that make up the Sea Grant Association, we would like to thank you for your strong support of ocean science and conservation in the U.S. Senate and urge prompt passage of S 3297—Advancing America’s Priorities Act. Title V, Subpart B—Oceans of S 3297 contains six vital ocean research, conservation, and education bills:

- Part I Hydrographic Services Improvement Act Amendments of 2008
- Part II Ocean Exploration
- Part III Ocean and Coastal Mapping Integration Act
- Part IV National Sea Grant College Program Amendments Act of 2008
- Part V Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2008
- Part VI Federal Ocean Acidification Research and Monitoring Act of 2008

These bills are consistent with the extensive analyses and recommendations of the Pew Oceans Commission, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, the President’s Ocean Action Plan, and the Administration’s Ocean Research Priorities Plan. Collectively these bills will significantly advance our understanding of coastal, ocean and Great Lake ecosystems, climate change, and promote both conservation and sustainable use of our ocean resources. All of the bills have passed the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee and the House of Representatives with bipartisan support.

With more than 50 percent of the U.S. population living in coastal counties, these regions are essential contributors to our economy, quality of life, maritime safety, national competitiveness, and national security. With an ever-changing climate, increasing natural hazards, and declining fisheries and reduced water quality, we need the tools to conserve and manage our ocean assets and better understand how ocean and coastal ecosystems respond to natural and human-related hazards.

These provisions would: 1) fuel exploration and inspire future generations of ocean explorers, scientists, marine, and industry leaders; 2) foster the development and integration of ocean observational systems to protect public health through the identification of marine toxins and pollutants in coastal areas; 3) improve prediction of and warnings of tsunamis, hurricanes, El Niño events and other natural hazards; 4) enhance homeland security, support maritime operations and collect important information needed to address global warming, improve ocean health and provide for the protection, sustainable use and enjoyment of ocean resources.
We hope you will demonstrate your continued commitment to strengthening our Nation’s understanding and conservation of the oceans through quick passage of S 3297.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Gagosian  
President  
Consortium for Ocean Leadership

James D. Watkins  
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)  
Chairman, US Commission on Ocean Policy  
Co-Chair, Joint Ocean Commission Initiative

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta  
Chair, Pew Oceans Commission  
Co-Chair, Joint Ocean Commission Initiative

James Sanders  
President  
National Association of Marine Laboratories

Paul Anderson  
President  
Sea Grant Association