

## **Time to Demonstrate Commitment to a Coordinated, Comprehensive National Ocean Policy**

**An open letter to President Bush from NRDC executive director Frances Beinecke.**

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This September 17, 2004, letter from NRDC executive director Frances Beinecke to President Bush urges the president to act quickly on the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy's call to restore our nation's ocean health.

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September 17, 2004

President George W. Bush  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

On Monday, September 20, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy will deliver to you its final report on the state of our nation's oceans and coasts. The 16-member commission that you appointed on July 3, 2001 has provided our nation with not only a much-needed status report, but also detailed recommendations for improving our ocean and coastal policy, science, management and conservation. Not since the Stratton Commission report in 1969 has the nation been provided such a comprehensive report on our oceans and coasts.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy report, together with the independent Pew Oceans Commission report released in June 2003, describe a failed system of governance that has led to seriously threatened coasts and oceans. Both reports identify the urgent need for change in order to reverse this trend. Despite the differences in commission membership and purview, both reports make similar recommendations to improve our failed ocean governance system and restore our marine resources.

Under the Oceans Act of 2000, you have 90 days to submit to Congress a statement of proposals to implement or respond to the commission's recommendations for a coordinated, comprehensive, long-range national policy for the responsible use and stewardship of ocean and coastal resources. Further, the Oceans Act calls for you to consult with state and local governments and non-governmental organizations and individuals involved in ocean and coastal activities prior to submitting the report to Congress.

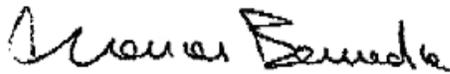
We respectfully urge you to immediately take the following actions to demonstrate your commitment to addressing the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy's call to restore our nation's ocean health.

1. **Improve ocean governance:** Both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission reports conclude that our current system of ocean governance has failed. They both call for establishing a national oceans policy and a strong supportive governmental framework for implementing that policy. We ask that you immediately take the following steps to advance a coordinated, comprehensive national ocean policy:
  - Establish the following governance reforms by executive order:
    - Make oceans conservation a national priority by creating a national oceans policy to "protect, maintain, and restore the health of marine ecosystems."
    - Create a position of national oceans Advisor to the president in the Executive Office of the White House to be the president's lead advisor regarding ocean and coastal issues including budget and policy development and implementation efforts, such as the national oceans policy.
    - Create National Oceans Council in the Executive Office of the White House that will be the lead intergovernmental body to coordinate federal ocean activities and ensure that the national ocean policy is implemented across the federal government. The national oceans advisor should be the chair of the council.
  - Provide an administration statement of support for H.R. 4900, Oceans Conservation, Education and National Strategy for the 21st Century Act (OCEANS-21). OCEANS-21 represents a strong, bipartisan effort to implement recommendations of both commissions including improvements to ocean governance and a national oceans policy.
  
2. **Restore funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA):** Both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission reports called for significant increases in the federal oceans budget to effectively reform our ocean governance and improve ocean conservation and science. However, funding for ocean and coastal programs within NOAA, the lead civilian federal oceans agency, has been slashed in the House fiscal year 2005 Commerce-Justice-State-Judiciary appropriations bill (FY05 CJS bill). We recommend that you immediately act to restore NOAA funding and:
  - Provide an administration statement of support for the increased appropriations for NOAA's ocean and coastal management, conservation, and science programs in the Senate FY05 CJS bill.
  - Direct the Office of Management and Budget to substantially increase funding for NOAA's ocean and coastal management, conservation, and science programs in the FY06 administration budget request to Congress.

3. **Protect deep sea corals and other sensitive deep sea habitats:** Research shows that the deep sea coral habitats are as important to global biodiversity and sustainable fisheries as those in shallow water. Deep sea coral habitats are especially vulnerable to damaging fishing activities, including bottom trawling. We recommend that you take immediate steps to protect deep sea corals by doing the following:
  - Provide an administration statement of support for a United Nations moratorium on high seas bottom trawling until an effective governance regime is in place to protect sensitive deep sea habitats.
  - Establish by executive order a policy to protect deep sea corals from damaging fishing activities.
4. **Protect wetlands, headwaters and coastal waters:** The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy final report recognizes the importance of preserving and protecting our remaining coastal wetlands. It also recognizes the need to protect coastal and ocean waters from pollution entering rivers and streams that ultimately flow into the ocean. One of the best ways to protect coastal waters is to protect the upstream waters that remove pollutants before they reach the shore. We ask that you immediately take the following actions:
  - Rescind the current U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency guidance/policy directive that illegally and unjustifiably narrows the scope of Clean Water Act jurisdiction, thereby weakening protections for our nation's waters and wetlands.
  - Provide an administration statement of support for the Clean Water Authority Restoration Act, H.R. 962 and S. 473. This legislation would reaffirm protection of the nation's waters as Congress originally intended.
5. **Stop the spread of "dead zones" in our coastal waters:** As the preliminary U.S. Commission Report recognized, "Without concerted, coordinated, and sustained action to reduce nitrogen sources, nutrient pollution will be a continuing problem in the nation's coastal waters." We ask you to fully fund and implement the Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating, and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico (2001), make good stewardship practices a prerequisite to receive federal agriculture program funding, set a firm deadline for states to issue water quality standards for nitrogen and phosphorous, and require sewage treatment plants discharging into waters impaired by excessive nutrients to implement biological nutrient removal.
6. **Prevent overfishing:** Both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy final report and the Pew Oceans Commission report describe the need for change in fishery management decision-making to revive our fish stocks and fisheries. Specifically, both reports recommend the need to separate conservation decisions from allocation decisions in order to ensure that conservation decisions, including catch levels, are set by science rather than by politics. To further this goal, we recommend that the secretary of commerce reject catch levels proposed by regional fishery management councils that exceed levels recommended by independent scientists and the NOAA Fishery Science Centers.

We respectfully urge you to take action to improve ocean health by improving ocean governance, restoring NOAA funding in FY05 and increasing it in FY06, protecting deep-sea corals, protecting wetlands and coastal waters, stopping the spread of "dead zones," and preventing overfishing. Addressing these six topics now using the action items we recommend will be a significant first step to improving the health of our nation's coasts and oceans. Please join us in working to improve ocean health so that people all over the country can enjoy the many benefits afforded by our coasts and oceans for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Frances Beinecke  
Executive Director

Cc:

Secretary Evans, Department of Commerce  
Secretary Powell, Department of State  
Director Bolten, Office of Management and Budget  
Jim Connaughton, Council on Environmental Quality, Chair  
Vice Admiral Lautenbacher, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Administrator Leavitt, Environmental Protection Agency  
Senator Byrd, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Senator Daschle, Senate Minority Leader  
Senator Frist, Senate Majority Leader  
Senator Gregg, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, State, Justice, and Judiciary  
Senator Hollings, Ranking Member, Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee and Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
Senator Kerry, Ranking Member, Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere and Fisheries  
Senator McCain, Chairman, Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee  
Senator Snowe, Chair, Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere and Fisheries  
Senator Stevens, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Representative DeLay, House Majority Leader  
Representative Gilchrest, Chairman, House Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans  
Representative Obey, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee  
Representative Pallone, Ranking Member, House Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans  
Representative Pelosi, House Minority Leader  
Representative Pombo, Chairman, House Resources Committee  
Representative Rahall, Ranking Member, House Resources Committee  
Representative Serrano, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary

Representative Wolf, Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
State and the Judiciary

Representative Bill Young, Chairman, House Appropriations Committee