

**ORAL TESTIMONY OF
JOHN T. WOESTE, Ph.D.
VICE CHAIR,
NATIONAL SEA GRANT REVIEW PANEL
OFFICE OF OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC RESEARCH
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**HEARING ON
SEA GRANT REAUTHORIZATION**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

APRIL 3, 2008

Good morning Madam Chair, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Committee. I serve as Vice Chair of the National Sea Grant Review Panel, a Federal Advisory Committee. Today, I will talk about the role of the National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel), and issues relevant to this vibrant program.

Over the past decade, the Panel has conducted 59 on-site program reviews, making several hundred recommendations to enhance Sea Grant's effectiveness and almost all of these recommendations have been implemented.

The Congressionally-directed National Research Council (NRC) report, released in 2006 concluded that the program evaluation process established in 1998 "has led to improvements to the overall program."

In response to other NRC recommendations, Sea Grant is developing a five-year national strategic plan and an Integrated Planning, Implementation and Evaluation

System. The new integrated system builds upon an already strong evaluation process, and is highly endorsed by the Panel.

There are several issues we would like to see addressed in the new authorization.

The NRC expressed concern that the focus on ranking programs was an impediment to the National Sea Grant Office's role of improving individual programs. The Panel agrees with the NRC's conclusion. The ranking component has had the unintended consequence of providing a powerful disincentive for collaboration within the Sea Grant network and could impede desired regional and national level cooperation. The Panel strongly believes that Sea Grant programs must continue to be reviewed and rated. Removing the ranking language will not compromise a rigorous rating and performance-based award system. We urge you to remove the statutory provisions for "ranking" programs.

In addition, despite rigorous reviews and acclaimed program impacts, Sea Grant's buying power continues to erode. If this trend continues, the promise and potential of Sea Grant contributions will all but disappear. Congress got it right in 2002 when it authorized the Sea Grant program at its 2008 level of \$103M.

Based on recent Panel analyses, Sea Grant would require a \$190M appropriation to have same buying power it had in 1972. The Panel has become very concerned about this downward trend. One impact has been a 30% decline in funded research projects over the past decade, despite growing demands for science-based solutions.

Another concern is the 5% legislatively-mandated administrative cap. The National Sea Grant Office currently has 40% fewer staff than in 1991 (29.0 vs. 17.4 current Full-Time Equivalents).

Our analysis shows that a cap increase from 5% to 7% as a minimum is necessary for the National Office to effectively fulfill its NRC recommended program leadership and coordination roles. Shorting those roles, we fear, misses opportunities for meaningful linkage of federal agency resources with partnership efforts addressing regional and national concerns such as those set forth in the *2007 Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy*.

The Panel believes Sea Grant is vital to NOAA's mission and to our nation's vitality. This program offers a proven in the field infrastructure engaging the academic capacity of our universities and colleges in generating science-based solutions. As a nation, we face numerous coastal challenges including climate

change, sea level rise, fishing declines and coastal growth. The Sea Grant program, with a strong record of leveraging resources, adept at public engagement, and committed to developing a diverse, competent workforce is more critical than ever to address these problems. We are grateful for your support of the National Sea Grant College Program. This concludes my remarks, Madam Chairwoman and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.