



Scott Perkins, Chair
William Hanson, Vice Chair

December 9, 2014

Kathryn Sullivan, Ph.D.

Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 6217
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Sullivan:

The Hydrographic Services Review Panel (HSRP) developed five recommendations resulting from our meeting in Charleston, SC, September 16-19, 2014:

1. Coastal Resilience & Shallow Water Bathymetry
2. Effective Partnerships
3. National and Coastal Infrastructure Investment & Planning
4. Arctic Survey Contingency Plan
5. Right Whale Speed Restrictions in Charleston Approach

Each of these recommendations is discussed further below.

Recommendation #1

Coastal Resilience & Shallow Water Bathymetry

The economic, environmental, and cultural importance of the coasts and coastal waters are well established, but the HSRP has heard from many of our technical and stakeholder panels that foundational shallow water coastal bathymetry is lacking. While the Office of Coast Survey understandably prioritizes hydrographic surveys in the main shipping channels, up-to-date survey data from shallow-water areas will yield significant benefits, including: reduced recreational boating accidents and fatalities, improved inundation mapping & modeling to support coastal resiliency and emergency planning, and enhanced ecological protection. We ask NOAA to expedite its work with the Army Corps of Engineers to adopt the use of their shallow water hydrographic survey data (especially along the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway) and the use of other data from trusted partners with authoritative data sets for charting. We also encourage NOAA to look for ways to incorporate non-authoritative data and new unmanned technologies to expand available bathymetric data. The HSRP recommends that NOAA undertake an assessment to identify and prioritize geographic areas needing comprehensive and up-to-date shallow water bathymetry as part of its high-priority coastal resilience mission.

Then develop a plan defining financial requirements needed to accomplish the acquisition and maintenance of these data sets.

Recommendation #2

Effective Partnerships

From stakeholder input heard in New York, Alaska and Hawaii, it is clear that strong regional partnerships exist. But NOAA's ability to cooperate with other Federal agencies is too often challenged by the complexities of executing interagency agreements. The HSRP has heard that agreements with USGS or EPA are relatively straightforward and already exist, while cost sharing with USACE, USCG, FEMA, and DOD is difficult. Establishing and maintaining partnerships and interagency agreements is crucial in order to enable regional programs to operate efficiently and gain the benefits of cost sharing. The HSRP recommends that NOAA review the processes in place for accepting funds from other agencies, and determine what steps are necessary to simplify, streamline, and expedite these processes.

Recommendation #3

Coastal Infrastructure Investment & Planning

The HSRP recommends that NOAA develop a list of priority projects for hydrographic surveying, and maintain that list, as work is completed and new priorities identified. Survey-ready projects in different geographies with stakeholder needs identified in advance can prove beneficial in the event that disaster-related or other supplemental funding becomes available. The list should include a mix of projects best suited for completion by both NOAA fleet and contractor assets. These projects should become foundational pieces of a national coastal infrastructure plan that can be endorsed by key stakeholders and supporters, and become an element of a National Mapping Strategy that enables sharing of funds among agencies as part of this strategy.

U.S. Infrastructure Investment

It has become clear to the HSRP through recent listening sessions, (i.e. New Orleans, New York, Charleston), that the lack of adequate U.S. infrastructure investment is an enormous and growing problem in our country. Federal funding for dredging, port expansion, highway, and rail lag far behind the world's developing countries. It is recommended that the NOAA Administrator meet with the Secretary of Commerce to discuss what collective efforts within the Administration or with other agencies can take place to increase the level of U.S. infrastructure investment.

Recommendation #4

Arctic Survey Contingency Plan

The HSRP is concerned about the coming end of life cycle for the NOAA Ships *Rainier* and *Fairweather* and the impact on NOAA's hydrographic surveying capacity in the Arctic when this significant capability is lost. The lack of up-to-date charting data and emerging commercial interests is a unique situation in the Arctic with direct relevance to National Security and vessel safety. Both the *Rainier* and *Fairweather* have 10-12 years of operational life remaining. The time to develop replacement vessels is also estimated at 10 years, so now is the time to develop contingency plans for accomplishing

hydrographic surveys in the Arctic without the *Rainier* and *Fairweather*, and to fully evaluate the potential of future data collection platforms, including both Federal and contractor-owned assets, as well as through trusted partnerships. The HSRP recommends that NOAA develop a contingency plan for accomplishing Arctic hydrographic surveys in the event the capacities and capabilities of *Rainier* and *Fairweather* are gapped, and prepare a Capitol Investment Plan for meeting survey requirements in the Arctic.

Recommendation #5

Right Whale Speed Restrictions in the Charleston Harbor Approach

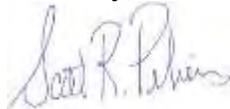
The testimony received while in Charleston regarding the right whale vessel speed restrictions in the approach to Charleston Harbor presented compelling first-hand testimony on the peril to safe navigation. The panel heard how navigation risk increases significantly for large container vessels operating at slow speeds in narrow channels. Detailed analysis was presented to the HSRP demonstrating the extremely low number of sightings of right whales in the geographic proximity of the Charleston Harbor Approach. The HSRP is concerned that these speed restrictions are creating unsafe conditions in the Charleston Harbor Approach, and recommends NOAA review them. Alternatives should be considered to manage these speed restrictions in order to reduce unnecessary navigation risk. An example is the right whale listening network implemented in the Massachusetts Bay shipping lanes.

On behalf of the HSRP members, I submit these recommendations for your consideration and look forward to your response. Furthermore, I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these recommendations.

As you know, by statute the HSRP meets twice a year. In an effort to be more useful to NOAA, we have established a series of working groups. These groups consist of HSRP members but also allow for input from non-HSRP members, similar to your very successful format for NOAA's Science Advisory Board. Two new working groups are being proposed on Infrastructure and Engagement.

The HSRP has benefited from your participation in our meetings and welcome your attendance this spring at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Sincerely,



Scott R. Perkins, Chair
Hydrographic Services Review Panel

William Hanson, Vice-Chair
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