



*Ed Welch, Chair*  
*Matt Wellslager, Vice Chair*

June 27, 2011

Jane Lubchenco, 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. Lubchenco:

The Hydrographic Services Review Panel (HSRP), a NOAA Federal Advisory Committee, is pleased to report on our May 4-6, 2011, meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii.

As a result of this meeting, the HSRP has accomplished its long standing goal of conducting public meetings in all geographic regions of the United States. The HSRP, with the support of the leadership of NOAA's National Ocean Service, considered it important to enable users of NOAA navigation and hydrographic services and products throughout the nation to address the HSRP in person.

This was the first meeting since you appointed nine new members and reappointed an existing member to the HSRP on March 31 of this year. We had excellent attendance, with 12 of the 15 HSRP members present.

The Lieutenant Governor of Hawai'i, the Honorable Brian Schatz, provided the keynote address to the HSRP. He demonstrated an excellent awareness of the value of NOAA's hydrographic services, a fact that is not surprising when one realizes that he was associated with Sea Grant early in his professional career! He remarked that nautical charts and data about currents, tides, heights, and shorelines should be considered to be key components of the nation's public infrastructure. He pointed out that, during periods of budget austerity, it is incumbent on NOAA and users of NOAA navigation products to "speak up" for maintenance of funding levels for these activities.

We were privileged to visit the container terminal of Matson Navigation, Inc., and tour its U.S.-flagged vessel *M/V Mahi Mahi*. This exposure to the commercial marine transportation system demonstrated how essential the marine transportation system is to

the economy of Hawai'i. In particular, it drove home the point that most "warehousing" of products for the state's businesses and families takes place on the ships traveling to the islands; any interruption in the "just-in-time" marine transportation network causes shortages on grocery shelves and elsewhere in just a day or two. The shipping lines serving Hawai'i depend on NOAA's navigation information to maintain their posted schedules. Matson expressed an interest in NOAA devoting more attention to the study of certain "open ocean" and nearshore currents that affect its trade routes.

Over the next few years, the HSRP intends to structure its work strategically in a way that dovetails with objectives of NOAA's Next Generation Strategic Plan and the strategic action plans of the National Ocean Council. Specifically, the Panel will focus on how NOAA's hydrographic and nautical services can support:

- Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning;
- Ocean, Coastal and Great Lakes observations, mapping, and infrastructure;
- Resiliency and adaptation to climate change, and
- Evolving national policies in the Arctic, including response to rapidly changing conditions of climate, sea ice, and human uses.

As it customarily does, the HSRP convened "stakeholder panels" from private industry, all levels of government, and the nonprofit sector. In Honolulu, we heard from maritime stakeholders of the Pacific Islands, whose safety and livelihoods depend on NOAA's navigation products and services, and from users who rely on NOAA's foundational geospatial data for leveling, accurate elevations, and groundwater resource assessments. The Panel also heard from persons engaged in local civil defense, benthic habitat mapping, and waterways and coastal management.

The panelists commented on how NOAA's hydrographic and navigation services contribute to their work and offered suggestions as to how these services could be enhanced to serve the Pacific Ocean region. Nearly every participant emphasized the vast geographic area involved and how the tremendous distances and challenging physical conditions pose obstacles to fulfilling NOAA's missions.

Three of your new appointees to the HSRP made presentations on their areas of expertise (including Arctic policy, recreational boating, and Pacific habitat mapping) and how they use NOAA's navigation services data, products, and information.

Here are some of the comments and suggestions made by the presenters:

- Interest exists within the maritime transportation community and the U.S. Coast Guard in the establishment of PORTS® (Physical Observation Real-Time System) in Honolulu Harbor and in Kalaela Barbers Point Harbor, the location in recent years of at least two significant vessel groundings with ensuing coral reef damages;

- Efforts are underway to anticipate likely sea level rise to preserve and restore coastal dunes and to guide future development in order to adapt to climate change. Sea-level rise is of particular concern in the low-lying Pacific atolls and islands;
- NOAA provides essential baseline assistance to enable civil defense authorities in Hawai'i to more effectively deal with the three likeliest natural disasters – hurricanes, tsunamis (such as the one this past March), and flash floods;
- The state needs NOAA's help to prepare to respond to the anticipated arrival of massive amounts of marine debris that originated in Japan because of the tsunami;
- The recreational boating community in Hawai'i is an important sector whose development is hampered by inadequately maintained small harbors. The rapid and early dissemination of tsunami arrival information enabled boaters to act in sufficient time to mitigate damages, but small-boat harbors were unprepared for the damage they sustained. Numerous commercial and disaster management agencies expressed concern about the ability to re-open commercial harbors in the case of a major disaster;
- Benthic habitat mapping efforts are a key feature in preserving coral reefs, but obtaining near-shore bathymetric data for this purpose is difficult and expensive;
- Private business and public officials derive many uses from precise and updated geodetic information, especially horizontal and vertical data. This information is crucial in the management of Hawaii's groundwater resources, which provide 90 percent of the public water supply, and across the islands of the Pacific.

The HSRP concluded its work in Honolulu by holding a strategic session to focus the Panel's direction and purpose over the next 2-3 years. NOAA's navigation services offices presented a strategy guidance document seeking advice and recommendations for improving the quality and value of NOAA's navigation services. The strategic issues that were presented include:

- Improve the quality and delivery of navigation products and services to the maritime community;
- Maximize the societal value of navigation services in an era of declining federal budgets;
- Align navigation services to support National Ocean Policy priorities (discussed above); and
- Provide non-navigation constituents with services, data, products, and expertise.

In addition, the Panel received navigation services updates from NOAA's Office of Coast Survey, National Geodetic Survey, and the Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services. During its Honolulu session, the HSRP benefitted from the presence and active participation by Mr. David Kennedy, Assistant Administrator for the National Ocean Service. Mr. Kennedy swore in two of your HSRP appointees. High-

level NOAA leadership participation in HSRP meetings demonstrates the agency's commitment to the work of the Panel. We still hope that you will soon be able to be part of an HSRP meeting personally. To that end, we will advise you of the details of our next meeting as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edmund Welch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

Edmund Welch, Chair  
Hydrographic Services Review Panel

cc: David M. Kennedy, Acting Assistant Administrator, NOAA National Ocean Service