

October 17, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
United State Senate
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

On behalf of our combined millions of members, the undersigned organizations strongly urge you to support the implementation of the National Ocean Policy and oppose the Murkowski amendment to the Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill to eliminate or restrict funding for comprehensive ocean management and other coastal planning activities.

The amendment expected to be proposed by Sen. Murkowski to HR 2112, the FY12 Commerce Appropriations bill, would take modern ocean management backwards by seeking to eliminate any federal funding in FY12 for statutorily authorized ocean planning processes that fall within the broad definition of marine spatial planning in Executive Order 13547. Comprehensive ocean planning (technically known as “coastal and marine spatial planning”) is a process that brings together all users of the ocean including energy, fishing, and shipping industries, government and tribal representatives and the public to make informed and coordinated decisions about how to sustainably use the ocean using authorities and processes authorized under existing law. This process begins by mapping out ocean resources and uses and, together with stakeholder and public input, helps to identify areas that are appropriate for various current and future uses. Having a blueprint of ocean use allows agencies to use their existing powers to encourage development in the right places.

The process of ocean planning was highly recommended for adoption in US ocean management practices by several independent panels of ocean policy experts, business leaders, ocean user groups and scientists. These panels include: the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, appointed by President George W. Bush; the independent Pew Oceans Commission, which was chaired by current Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta; and the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, currently co-chaired by The Honorable William Ruckelshaus and The Honorable Norm Mineta. Each of these expert commissions recognized the process of regional ocean management as an opportunity to improve job creation, maintain economic benefits and sustain environmental stewardship of our nation’s valuable ocean resources.

The Murkowski amendment not only seeks to undermine the National Ocean Policy, but could also stop funding for current activities under longstanding programs that benefit coastal communities, maritime safety, ocean-related commerce and environmental resources. This includes activities under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act and potentially even NOAA’s integrated ocean and coastal mapping program. The Murkowski amendment would also limit support for coastal state involvement in the Smart from the Start offshore wind energy initiative.

The Murkowski amendment undercuts states’ coastal planning efforts and causes state resources that are already spent to have been wasted. States across several regions of the nation including

New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the West Coast have committed significant state resources in anticipation of federal partnership in developing regional ocean use management plans in 2012. Since most states' legal jurisdiction only extends three miles from the coastline, they need the federal government to serve as a responsible partner in a process to develop region-wide plans. These states have already spent millions of dollars and several years worth of work and are anticipating the federal government to serve as a responsible partner in a regional planning process. Further, the Murkowski amendment would have the effect of stopping federal agency personnel from collaborating with states on their planning needs. This funding limitation breaks the responsibility of the federal government to assist and coordinate in joint programs where state and federal responsibilities interact such as coastal management, wildlife and commercial fisheries management, and protecting coastal water quality.

The Murkowski amendment would also cause great harm to ocean and coastal management programs that are already severely underfunded. Federal budgets for coastal and ocean programs have already been subject to drastic cuts which not only jeopardize the longevity and effectiveness of vital programs, but also place at risk mariner safety, the ability to project weather and climate patterns, and the health of commercial fisheries stocks and ocean ecosystems. For example, the amount budgeted for NOAA's Operations, Research and Facilities program in the Senate FY12 Commerce appropriations bill is already \$171 million less than was enacted in FY10. The Murkowski amendment removes funding for a range of federal programs and line items without taking into consideration the cumulative impact of previous budget cuts on the daily operations of defense, science, natural resources management and economic development programs affecting our coasts and oceans.

The Murkowski amendment would increase inefficiency in agency operations and harm coastal and ocean economic development by limiting state and federal coordination and collaboration. Better ocean use planning that includes ocean industries and coastal businesses, state agencies, ocean users and local stakeholders will improve economic opportunities, help maintain this enormous economic sector and contribute to the stewardship of our oceans and coasts. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose the Murkowski amendment and other similar attempts to restrict or eliminate funding for the implementation of the National Ocean Policy.

Sincerely,

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