

**Comments of Commissioner Kurt Fredriksson
Resource Development Council's 26th Annual Conference
Emerging Oceans Policy: What it Means for Alaska
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Thank you for inviting me to this discussion on the emerging national ocean policy and what it means for Alaska. This is an extremely important topic to development and protection of Alaska's natural resources and an issue which Governor Murkowski has spoken out strongly on the need for state leadership. For those who may not be familiar with what we mean by "the emerging national ocean policy", I'll begin by briefly describing its major components.

At the heart of the national interest in ocean policy is the widely recognized value of the nation's ocean and coastal resources. Over the last thirty five years, Congress has debated and passed several important ocean and coastal related laws. The National Environmental Policy Act in 1969, Coastal Zone Management Act in 1972, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act in 1977, Clean Water Act in 1977, and Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act amendments in 1978 were all adopted by congress to protect the value of the oceans and coastal areas for the nation's economic and social well being.

The most recent expression of public concern for the nation's oceans was passage of the Oceans Act in 2000 that established the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy to develop recommendations for a coordinated and comprehensive national ocean policy. After four years of study, the Commission concluded that the Nation's oceans and coasts are in serious trouble from land and air pollution, unsustainable exploitation of fishery resources, and ineffective management dispersed across a confusing array of government agencies and research organizations.

To correct these problems, the Commission made 212 specific recommendations to the President and Congress. Most of these recommendations were made to solve problems found outside Alaska.

The Commission's recommendations were the first major component of the new national ocean policy. The second major component was the President's response to the Commission's recommendation. Following the release of the Commission's report, President Bush adopted a U.S. Action Plan to guide the federal executive branch response to the Commission's recommendations. The Action Plan followed on the heels of the Presidential election and is a general outline of initial steps to a new ocean policy.

The President's Plan established a new Cabinet-level Committee on Ocean Policy, chaired by the Council of Environmental Quality, to coordinate the activities of executive branch agencies regarding ocean-related matters.

Included in the Committee's mission is the direction to consult with State and local governments, and streamline unnecessary overlapping authorities.

Congressional legislation is the final component of a new nation policy. There are currently dozens of single purpose ocean related bills, but no comprehensive "big ocean bill" that would tie together the 212 recommendations made by the Ocean Policy Commission.

Now that you know the basic underpinnings of the national ocean policy agenda, we can consider "what does this mean for Alaska?"

It's been my experience that the greatest threat to Alaska is from federal policies intended to fix a national problem that doesn't fit Alaska. When federal policy makers view Alaska as little more than a tiny insert in the corner of a map next to Guam and Hawaii, our resources suffer.

Unlike the rest of the nation, Alaska's oceans are healthy, productive, sustainably managed, and pollution free. Alaska's ocean resources are vast compared to those of the lower forty-eight.

Alaska has two-thirds of the nation's coastline, 40% of the nation's surface water, 20% of the nation's land base, and over half of the nation's wetlands. The Yukon River watershed is the nation's second largest watershed and covers nearly the entire state. The oceans off Alaska's shores comprise the largest contiguous offshore ocean mass in the country.

In addition to their size, Alaska's oceans and coastal watersheds produce 25% of the nation's oil, over 50% of the nation's seafood, minerals from several world-class mines, and provide international shipping lanes from the nation's west coast to Russia and Asia. The Commission's initial recommendations failed to recognize Alaska's unique conditions. They called for more federal agencies, to implement new federal laws that would control more state resources.

On several occasions, Governor Murkowski explained to the Commission and others the basic conditions needed to apply federal ocean policy in Alaska:

- State sovereignty over coastal waters and uplands must be maintained;
- A new federal bureaucracy is not needed to coordinate existing laws and ocean related programs;
- National policy must be tailored to fit Alaska's unique regional conditions and not forced to adopt one-size-fits all solutions; and
- Environmental monitoring and research must serve state pollution control and resource management priorities.

The Governor wants national oceans policy implemented through the leadership of state government and built on state jurisdictional authorities for

pollution control and resource management. A national policy built upon a federal-state partnership to manage and protect Alaska's living and non-living natural resources.

The Commission's final recommendations were changed to incorporate many of the Governor's conditions. The President's Action Plan also provides the opportunity for greater collaboration with the states, while being flexible to regional differences.

On the day the President issued his Ocean Action Plan, Governor Murkowski signed Administrative Order 223 creating an Alaska Ocean Policy Cabinet comprised of Commissioners of the Departments of Fish and Game; Natural Resources; Environmental Conservation; Commerce, Community, and Economic Development; the Governor's Fisheries Policy Advisor; and the Governor's Director of State and Federal Relations.

The Ocean Policy Cabinet meets regularly to advise the Governor on ocean policy actions by Congress or federal agencies. The Governor's Order also created an Ocean Policy Coordinator to serve as the state administration's liaison with interested stakeholders on ocean policy related issues.

To date, the Ocean Policy Cabinet has focused on three key areas affecting Alaska. First, the Cabinet conveyed the administration's unified position on a number of important ocean-related legislation being considered by Congress. Two bills of particular concern are Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and a bill that would create regional associations responsible for developing and operating integrated ocean observing systems. The Department of Fish and Game's web page has a link to the administration's position on important ocean-related legislation.

The second area the Ocean Policy Cabinet focused its attention on is partnerships with federal agencies to share ocean related information. Yesterday the Cabinet met with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and a number of federal agencies to discuss ocean management issues in the Aleutian Islands region and explore future opportunities for interagency collaboration. It was generally agreed that a state/federal forum for sharing resource information could be a positive step forward. There was no support for creating a state/federal decision making body.

The final major area of work by the Ocean Policy Cabinet has been to better define the State's research and information priorities. Substantial financial investments are made each year to collect and synthesize natural resource data. The Cabinet is working with the University of Alaska and others to better match the investments in natural resource research with the daily needs of resource managers and pollution control specialists.

Much has happened since the Ocean Commission released their draft report in 2004. The national ocean policy that was emerging then is quite different than

what we see now due in large part to state leadership. At that time, it appeared Alaska might be subjected to more federal control, at greater expense, with little guarantee of better results. Today, we look forward to a federal policy that will work with states to solve regional problems with existing authorities and better information.

A final national ocean policy has yet to be adopted. Until adoption, Governor Murkowski's Ocean Policy Cabinet will keep a watchful eye on proposals from Congress and the federal executive branch. We will also work with federal agencies operating in Alaska to share information and develop workable solutions to Alaska's resource development and protection issues.

I appreciate this opportunity to meet with members of the Resource Development Council and am happy to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.