



Emily Douce, Conservation Projects Manager

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*The Honorable Frank R. Wolf, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives, H-307  
Washington, DC 20515*

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Marine Conservation Institute, based in Seattle, WA, is a nonprofit conservation organization that uses the latest science to identify important marine ecosystems around the world, and advocates for their protection for us and future generations. Just as we have protected a significant portion of America's lands with parks and forests to conserve the wildlife and provide recreational opportunities for the public, Marine Conservation Institute believes that the same must be done for our oceans. I wish to thank the members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the FY 2014 appropriations in regards to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NOAA's satellite and weather programs are vital to alerting citizens about oncoming weather events; however these programs should not continue to be funded at the expense of NOAA's ocean and coastal activities. **Marine Conservation Institute supports \$26 million in additional funding (compared to previously enacted levels) to restore support to a select few ocean programs including the National Marine Sanctuary Program, Pacific Marine Monuments Program, Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Program, Law Enforcement Program, and the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations.**

As a member of the Friends of NOAA coalition, Marine Conservation Institute works with other supporters, stakeholders, and partners of NOAA to educate and inform interested audiences about the full range of NOAA activities, enabling the agency to more effectively carry out its responsibilities relating to our ocean and coasts, fisheries, research, and weather and climate, including satellites.

NOAA is one of the premier science agencies in the federal government and provides decision makers with critically important data, products, and services that promote and enhance the nation's economy, security, environment, and quality of life. According to the National Ocean Economics Program, the US ocean economy contributes more than \$258 billion to our nation's Gross Domestic Product through fisheries and seafood production, tourism, recreation, construction, and transportation. Additionally, over 2.7 million jobs in the US depend on the marine environment.<sup>1</sup> NOAA's programs are critical to protecting ocean health for sustained use and long term survival of its wildlife.

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<sup>1</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Economics: National Ocean Watch (ENOW)*. 2013. [www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/data/enow](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/data/enow) (accessed March 4, 2013).

I would like to highlight a few programs that Marine Conservation Institute believes are essential to NOAA's conservation mandate.

### **National Marine Sanctuaries**

National marine sanctuaries preserve biologically and culturally important areas of our nation's oceans for us and future generations. Presently, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) is responsible for managing the nation's 13 marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Our marine sanctuaries support thousands of coastal businesses, protect underwater and maritime treasures, and provide ocean recreation, research, and education for the public. For example, more than 400,000 visitors to the Florida Keys sanctuary spent over 2 million person-days of recreational fishing in one year and spent \$274 million in nearby counties. In Massachusetts, over 700,000 tourists spent a total of \$126 million on commercial whale-watching trips to the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary during 2008, supporting 31 local businesses and almost 600 jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Continued underfunding will force ONMS to cut treasured public access and recreation opportunities, cancel collaborative efforts with museums and universities, and dismantle successful education initiatives that benefit local communities.

Marine Conservation Institute recommends \$60.5 million in FY 2014. This amount includes \$55 million for the operations and research account, and \$5.5 million for the construction account. This would allow ONMS to better fulfill its responsibilities, particularly as ONMS is being asked to do more with less. For example, in 2013 the Marine Protected Area Center was subsumed by the ONMS and the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa was expanded by 13,580 square miles; however, additional resources have not been allocated to cover these responsibilities.

### **Pacific Marine National Monuments**

Three marine national monuments (Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, Rose Atoll Marine National Monument, and Marianas Trench Marine National Monument) were established in 2009 by President George W. Bush in the Pacific Ocean. Together with Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (established in 2006), they protect approximately 331,797 square miles of spectacular marine habitat.

Compared to other marine ecosystems, the marine monuments ecosystems are relatively intact and rich in biodiversity. These areas include some of the most pristine tropical islands and coral reef ecosystems in the world and contain vast amounts of shallow-water reef-building coral

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<sup>2</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *National Marine Sanctuaries and Local Economies*. 2012. <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/socioeconomic/factsheets/welcome.html> (accessed June 8, 2012).

species, hundreds of fish species, and dozens of species of seabirds. Migrating fish, turtles, birds and marine mammals frequent the islands, including endangered and threatened green and hawksbill sea turtles and whales. Mostly uninhabited, the marine monument waters are relatively free from the problems plaguing many other marine ecosystems: over-exploitation, disturbance, and pollution. Using these remarkably intact tropical ecosystems, we are developing an understanding of what healthy and productive places really look like which is helping to identify negative impacts to marine ecosystems closer to home and showing us the benefits of restoration.

With the establishment of the monuments came the responsibility of developing and implementing appropriate management measures to adequately protect these biologically and historically significant areas. Without sufficient and sustained resources, NOAA cannot adequately protect these areas from illegal fishing, invasive species, vessel groundings and other threats. Continued budget cuts will reduce critical research and outreach grants to university scientists and non-government organizations; reduce opportunities for Pacific island students to enroll for a term in ocean science or conservation courses with renowned marine institutions (e.g. Scripps Institute of Oceanography) with the goal of recruiting and fostering careers in conservation in island communities; and lessen the United States' ability to share information and ideas with other Pacific island nations about monitoring climate change, conserving endangered and threatened species, and developing remote surveillance capabilities. Therefore, Marine Conservation Institute recommends \$3 million for the Pacific Marine Monuments Program in FY 2014.

### **Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery**

NOAA has responsibility for reviving populations of the Hawaiian monk seal, one of the most critically endangered marine mammals in the world. It is also the only marine mammal whose entire distribution range lies within our national jurisdiction; thus the US has sole responsibility for its continued survival. Over the last 50 years, the Hawaiian monk seal population has experienced a severe decline of 60%, and now the population is slightly more than 1,000 individuals. Various factors have contributed to the seal's decline including: human hunting of the species to near extinction in the mid-1800's; entanglement in marine debris; being hooked or entangled by fishing gear; loss of habitat for pupping and resting; and competition for food in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands; to name a few.

There is reasonable hope for the monk seal if a small subpopulation in the main Hawaiian Islands can continue to grow. However, this population growth has generated increased conflicts with recreational fishermen who unintentionally hook or entangle monk seals. In 2012 alone, there were 15 confirmed hooking incidents, and three died as a result. Hostility toward the seal has become toxic in some communities, prompting at least four intentional seal killings on Kaua'i and Moloka'i in a little over a year.

This subcommittee's decision to more than double the program funds to approximately \$5.6 million in FY 2009 and FY 2010 allowed NOAA to make great strides in implementing the

monk seal recovery plan. It has been conservatively estimated that 30% of the monk seals alive today are due to direct actions by NOAA and its partners<sup>3</sup>. However, we are concerned that funding for the monk seal has severely decreased in recent years (a level as low as \$2.7 million in 2011). Furthermore, our analysis indicates that cuts to the monk seal program have been disproportionate compared to other marine mammal species under NOAA's jurisdiction.

Lower funding levels in recent years have already severely affected recovery efforts by reducing field camps essential for population monitoring and seal protection; hampering critical community liaison efforts to explore and explain the importance of the monk seal in Native Hawaiian culture; removing specialists who eliminate sharks preying on seal pups; and diminishing research programs that develop mitigation measures for fisheries interactions and other human-seal interactions. Marine Conservation Institute strongly recommends the subcommittee moderately increase funding to \$4.5 million in FY 2014 to begin to reinstate NOAA's lost capability to recover the species.

### **Law Enforcement**

NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) is responsible for enforcing the laws that conserve and protect our nation's fisheries, threatened and endangered species, and marine sanctuaries and monuments. The office is also responsible for enforcing the United States' international commitments to fight illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing (also called "pirate fishing"), a practice that threatens to undermine global fish stocks, such as the Pacific tuna fishery in which the US participates. IUU fishing also affects US fishermen and fishing communities by reducing opportunities and prices for fish here at home.

NOAA's jurisdiction spans 3.4 square million miles of coastal and marine environments, including the nation's 13 marine sanctuaries and 4 marine national monuments mentioned above. The Pacific region alone poses a huge challenge for NOAA OLE because it covers 1.5 million square miles, nearly one half of the US Exclusive Economic Zone.

The most recent analysis indicates that the US commercial fishing alone contributed \$7.3 billion to the US Gross Domestic Product. However, over a quarter of the US fish stocks are over-exploited. Additionally, as fish stocks decline worldwide, the threat of foreign poaching of US fishing stocks becomes greater, particularly in remote areas. Officials estimate the global value losses from IUU fishing ranges between \$10 billion and \$23.5 billion annually. For domestic and international fish stocks to recover, strict regulations and increased enforcement must be put in place, particularly in remote areas such as the Pacific marine monuments.<sup>4</sup>

Marine Conservation Institute strongly supports \$67.1 million for NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement in FY 2014. This will allow OLE to maintain current capabilities, while also providing modest additional funding to the Pacific Region for the added responsibility of protecting the marine monuments from IUU fishing by foreign fleets.

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<sup>3</sup> McAvoy, Audrey. "Feds – Efforts to rescue monk seals helping species." Associated Press in West Hawaii Today, January 26, 2012

<sup>4</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Illegal Fishing: Not in Our Ports.*, 2012.  
[http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ia/iuu/portstate\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ia/iuu/portstate_factsheet.pdf) (Accessed July 7, 2012).

## Marine Operations and Maintenance

The Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) operates NOAA's fleet of specialized ships to fulfill the agency's environmental and scientific missions. OMAO provides vessels for fisheries research, oceanographic and atmospheric research, and hydrographic surveys. Ships are also used for monitoring marine sanctuaries and monuments, and servicing the early warning tsunami and weather system equipment.

Not since 2007 has OMAO operated its ships at full capacity, largely due to budget constraints. In 2012, NOAA's 17 fully operational vessels were at sea for an average of 158 days each, which is about 72% of the fleet's operational capability (max = 220 days per vessel). However, NOAA's program offices had to 'buy' 19% of the total days-at-sea to fulfill some of their basic mandates. For instance, the National Marine Fisheries Service purchased 396 days in FY 2012.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the line offices are experiencing budget constraints as well.

A cut to OMAO (similar to the one proposed in the US House of Representatives in 2012) would drastically impact the current NOAA fleet and its mission requirements. For instance, OMAO would likely begin consolidating the fleet to 9 ships. A smaller fleet would likely eliminate approximately 220 staff positions and lead to the closure of the South Carolina homeport. Other impacts would include eliminating NOAA's only global class ship, as well as diminish NOAA's capacity to service DART (Deep-ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunamis) buoys, our best early warning system to protect lives and property from tsunamis. A substantial cut would also hinder NOAA's ability to meet important fishery management provisions of the *Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act* which support our fishing industry and communities and the *Marine Mammal Protection Act*.

It makes no sense for NOAA's ships to be partially idle when one of NOAA's primary missions is to manage and restore our oceans. Marine Conservation Institute supports \$166 million for OMAO in FY 2014. This is a step toward more fully funding NOAA's fleet in order to fulfill its mandates.

In summary, Marine Conservation Institute respectfully requests that the subcommittee maintain or slightly augment funding for the conservation side of the NOAA budgets by the amounts discussed above.

Respectfully,



Emily J. Douce

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<sup>5</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – *FY 2012 Fleet Allocation Plan*. 2012. <http://www.oma.noaa.gov/shipallocation.html> (Accessed July 9, 2012).