

Rep. William R. Keating (MA-09) Testimony
House Commerce, Justice Science Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing
March 21, 2013

Thank you to Chairman Wolf, Ranking Member Fattah, and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for holding today's hearing on funding for Fiscal Year 2014 and for providing me with the opportunity to testify. While I appear before you to highlight some of my top priorities, I would like to emphasize that I will be following this hearing with letters to the Subcommittee specifying funding levels for additional programs that may go unmentioned today.

I have the distinct honor of representing Southeastern Massachusetts, including Cape Cod, the Islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, and the South Coast, including the Port of New Bedford – the highest grossing commercial fishing port in the continental 48 states. Once the home of New England's legendary whaling industry, this region remains inexorably linked to the ocean and stands in a position to become a global leader in sustainable jobs, new technologies, and emerging marine industries. For us, investments in fisheries management, coastal restoration, regional ocean planning, competitive grant programs and critical scientific research provided under the Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill make the difference between a paycheck and a pink slip.

First, I must begin by urging my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to work with me and my peers in providing emergency assistance to the states of Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York and Connecticut for an economic disaster issued by the Department of Commerce in September of last year for the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) fishery. This was an unprecedented declaration by the Secretary in advance of the 2013 fishing season, which begins in less than six weeks, and Members of the Committee have already received many letters and appeals from my colleagues and me on this subject. I thank you for your previous cooperation, and hope that you will continue to work with me to provide emergency funding.

New England's fishermen are not alone in their suffering. In 2012, Mississippi oyster and blue crabs and Alaskan Chinook salmon fisheries were also found to be suffering from an economic disaster, while Hurricane Sandy devastated the ports of New York and New Jersey. up again such severe restrictions in allowable catch for the season beginning May 1st that many of them are facing the reality of losing their livelihoods and only source of income. The Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act and the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act authorize funding for fishery disaster relief provided that Congress appropriate the necessary funds. To date, Congress has failed to act and appropriate adequate funding.

The true impact of fisheries disasters on coastal communities is incalculable. Fishermen from coast to coast will face an immediate and, in some cases, irreparable loss of livelihood if Congress is unable to provide them with financial assistance to survive the 2013 fishing year. Sincere attempts by federal and state government and industry alike to combat overfishing and rebuild stocks have repeatedly fallen flat due to lapses in resources and inaccuracies in research. In recent years, our fishermen's businesses have suffered due to inadequate data collection that

dictates catch quantities. We can – and we must – implement fair and effective fisheries management policies while targeting government abuse and inefficient waste.

To that extent, I encourage the Committee to provide level funding for the National Marine Fisheries Service. It is imperative that the National Marine Fisheries Service maintain the resources necessary to increase the frequency and accuracy of stock assessments, invest in cooperative research with the industry, and improve recreational fishing data collection programs. NOAA has committed to conducting an end-to-end review of the flawed stock assessment process with the assistance of Massachusetts' very own scientists and resources throughout this year, but cuts in funding would setback any implementation of the review's findings. Further, I hope that Members can work together to assist NOAA Fisheries in their ability to continue to provide at-sea monitoring coverage through the 2013 fishing year. The Agency has recently announced its intent to cover the cost as they have in previous years, provided that the number of trips not exceed the number from the 2012 fishing year. I am very concerned that the Agency's ability to meet this assurance comes at a cost: the very research that we are striving to improve.

Another top priority for Southeastern Massachusetts is continued funding for investments in ocean and coastal management and science. To this end, I hope to see \$10 million provided for the Regional Ocean Partnership competitive grants program. Massachusetts has set the national standard for implementation of comprehensive and proactive ocean and coastal management through our participation in the Northeast Regional Ocean Council, and it is through Regional Ocean Partnership grants that the Commonwealth has been able to coordinate amongst all stakeholders to navigate the complex resource management conflicts that arise from these promising new ocean uses.

We have a shared vision for this region akin to the development of Silicon Valley, where we will build on our existing and developing infrastructure and knowledge base to maximize the economic potential. The development of the 20 acre South Terminal in New Bedford harbor as a staging area for marine construction, shipping and repairs of turbines is already attracting investment attention and the institutional knowledge found at facilities like UMass Dartmouth, Wood's Hole Oceanographic Institute, Mass Maritime, Bristol Community College and the proposed maritime community college in Marshfield, working together with a diverse and skilled workforce has positioned Massachusetts to become a leader in offshore technologies.

In order to fulfill this potential, it is critical that we provide adequate funding for Regional Ocean Partnership grants. Across the northeastern coastal states, \$13.4 billion in GDP comes from ocean sectors in coastal counties. Regional Ocean Partnership Grants contribute to the protection and management of the coastal and ocean natural resources that fuel this important coastal economy. Nearly 100,000 workers in Massachusetts are employed by ocean-related industries, earning nearly \$2.8 billion in wages and contributing over \$5.5 billion.

To that extent, I also encourage the Committee to provide robust funding for NOAA's Cooperative Institute for North Atlantic Region (CINAR) CINAR is one of NOAA's 18 multi-institution cooperatives and includes the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in my district. As

the demand for timely data on weather, climate patterns, fisheries, oceans and additional coastal data grows, cooperative institutes like CINAR will become more and more critical.

As many of you are all too familiar, 2012 brought some of the most extreme and unprecedented climate events ever recorded. From Hurricane Sandy to the Superstorm in February and countless blizzards in between, the fragile coastal ecosystems of my home state were ravaged time and time again by hurricane-force winds and unforgiving tides. My district is just one example of the many communities dependent on core habitat restoration and protection programs that directly benefit these economies and are critical to restoring coastal and estuarine habitats. \$34 million for NOAA's coastal restoration programs, including the Community-based Restoration Program, the Estuary Restoration Program, and, NOAA's only coastal land acquisition program: the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP), would directly leverage private investments and promote a strong regional economy. Additionally, I request robust funding for NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System, which provides funding to states through 28 cooperative agreements that contribute science, education and training to offset declining local and state budgetary resources.

The health of my district's economy is directly linked to the health of our ecosystems, and I'm not just talking about the recreational and commercial fishing industries. We are dependent on the influxes of millions of tourists to our region's beaches and waterways each year. As populations and economies grow, bringing increased development and pressure along our coasts, NOAA's coastal programs offer irreplaceable support to communities throughout the nation that are willing to invest in the restoration of land that has significant ecological and economic values. In Massachusetts, where we just celebrated the 20th anniversary of Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, we know firsthand how communities will directly benefit from robust funding for NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries – not only from the conservation efforts that this funding allows but from the tourism that it also promotes.

Further, I would like to emphasize the need for continued restoration of the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program at \$4 million. Last year, the President's budget request eliminated funding for the Prescott Grant Program, which would have left local organizations and private donors to bear the burden of replacing nearly \$4 million in federal funds. Collaboration with regional organizations is essential to the National Marine Fisheries Service's success in implementing its mandates and this funding level is critical if we are to preserve the progress made in protected species research and management, continue to provide valuable species recovery grants, and provide funding to the local subsidiaries that carry out NMFS' requirements.

Finally, I urge you to include \$16 million for NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS) National Centers for Coastal and Ocean Science Extramural Research program. States and coastal communities rely upon the scientific information provided under this competitive extramural program to understand, monitor, manage and mitigate impacts associated with the increasing severity of Harmful Algal Blooms and hypoxia events in marine, Great Lakes, and other water systems.

To reiterate: there is an undeniable link between restoration and conservation efforts in coastal communities like mine and their economic viability. Now is not the time to cut funding for programs that will keep much-needed dollars in the pockets of hardworking men and women.

Before coming to Congress, I served as a District Attorney for twelve years. One of my top concerns has always been for public safety, particularly during times of fiscal uncertainty, and, to that end, I respectfully urge you to maintain support for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA).

Finally, I would like to request that the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program be appropriated to match the authorization that we passed in December. This funding is critical for fire houses across the country, particularly in New Bedford where understaffed men and women are already serving the needs of multiple communities in the region. Surely we can find alternatives to stripping the backbone of our communities – police officers, fire departments, ambulances – of the resources that protect our residents and bring stability to our neighborhoods. I would like to note that this is an issue in which I have been deeply engaged and one I will continue to pursue throughout the appropriations process. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the full Committee to preserve the SAFER grant program.

The American people understand: this is the year of budget constraints. My testimony not only reflects the priorities of the Ninth Congressional District of Massachusetts, but echoes the messages I have heard from across the country. We must ensure that this budget incorporates effective funding decisions that encourage efficiency but do not overlook the critical needs of Americans of all backgrounds.

Once again, I thank Chairman Wolf, Ranking Member Fattah, and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for the opportunity to testify today.