

May 5, 2025

Re: Support for IOOS & GCOOS RA Budget



Dear Honorable Members of Congress,

The fishing and seafood industry in the Gulf of America is concerned that the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) Regional Observations may be defunded as proposed in the Fiscal Year 2026 OMB passback to NOAA. IOOS and its regional observing systems are a proven federal-private partnership that delivers federally certified, real-time data essential for the safety and success of U.S. near shore and maritime industries.

IOOS plays a vital role in securing U.S. food dominance. The commercial fishing sector has worked with IOOS for years to align data and tools with our offshore operational needs, which has supported safety and efficiency for the fishing and seafood industry. In the Gulf of America, GCOOS (one of the IOOS regional systems) manages ocean temperature, salinity, current and other data from more than 1,600 sensors aimed at enhancing the safe operation of offshore projects. The fishing industry also relies on GCOOS's data portal for critical oceanographic and hydrographic information on the Gulf of America shelf, Loop Current, eddies, and some of the most significant risks to offshore personnel and infrastructure. Further, IOOS is the only federally sponsored network that works with NOAA and the Navy to deploy seasonal underwater autonomous vehicles that have improved hurricane intensity forecasts by up to 50%, helping better prepare and protect fishing personnel and infrastructure in the Gulf from hurricane threats. Finally, IOOS's High Frequency Radar Network for mapping surface current data over the continental shelf directly supports U.S. Coast Guard search and rescue missions and multi-agency mitigation of oil spills.

IOOS is a vital bipartisan program that is fully aligned with one of the Administration's priorities for NOAA to focus on collecting essential coastal ocean and weather observations to support navigation and forecasting. The IOOS Act was last signed into law in 2020 by President Trump. Representative Mike Ezell, representing coastal Mississippi, introduced a reauthorization bill (H.R. 2294) in the House on March 24 that currently has 17 bipartisan sponsors. IOOS received strong support from House Republicans in the last appropriations cycle (the House CJS bill funded IOOS at its authorized level of \$56M). It seems like an oversight that IOOS may be caught up in bigger cuts to NOAA and grant programs.

The IOOS network could not operate without continued federal investment, and the fishing and seafood industry stands firmly behind IOOS. We urge you to ensure that FY25 funding for IOOS Regional Observations is executed at the FY24 level (\$42.5M) and to oppose any defunding of IOOS as proposed in the FY26 OMB document.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Fred Stengard", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fredrik J. Stengard

Vice President, Research-Quality Assurance-Food Safety

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