



National Sea Grant Review Panel



Nathaniel E. Robinson
Chairman of the Board

Ensuring Environmental and Economic Prosperity for America's Coastal Communities

July 20, 2007

The Honorable Richard W. Spinrad, Ph.D.
Assistant Administrator
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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U. S. Department of Commerce
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Dear Dr. Spinrad:

Thank you for your kind invitation to the National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel) to share our views on aspects of the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) that can be improved and/or updated through the 2008-2014 reauthorizing legislation process. On behalf of members of the Panel, I am pleased to share with you the Panel's advice and recommendations for your consideration.

When developing our advice, we conversed with congressional staff, executive branch officials, leadership of NSGCP, and leadership of the Sea Grant Association (SGA) to identify issues related to the Sea Grant Program and changes that would add capacity and greater effectiveness to what is already a dynamic and highly relevant research, education and extension program that addresses the nation's critical marine and coastal issues.

Once again, thank you for soliciting our input. We trust that our advice will be helpful to you in developing the Administration's Reauthorization position. Please let me know if we can provide additional assistance.

Sincerely,

NATHANIEL E. ROBINSON
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
NATIONAL SEA GRANT REVIEW PANEL

cc: Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D.
Dr. Leon M. Cammen, Ph.D.
Members, National Sea Grant Review Panel

Executive Committee Members

Dr. Bill Stubblefield	Dr. Jerry Schubel	Dr. Peter Bell	Dr. Judith S. Weis	Dr. Frank Kudrna
West Virginia	California	Maryland	New Jersey	Illinois

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National Sea Grant Review Panel



*Working to
Ensure Environmental and Economic Prosperity for America's Coastal Communities*

Report of the National Sea Grant Review Panel on the 2008 Reauthorization of the National Sea Grant College Program

presented to

Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D.

Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Richard W. Spinrad, Ph.D.

Assistant Administrator for the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

and to

Leon M. Cammen, Ph.D.

Director of the National Sea Grant College Program
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

on

Friday
July 20, 2007

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

33 U. S. C. 1121 et. seq. establishes the National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel) through the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). The Act assigns the Panel with the responsibility to consult with and advise the Secretary of Commerce (DOC), the Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere (NOAA), and the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) on program performance, administration, designation, operations and such other matters as the Secretary refers to the Panel for review and advice.

Congressional authorization for the National Sea Grant College Program expires in 2008. Beginning in 2006, the Panel formed a committee to gather information and formulate language for an updated authorization bill. The Reauthorization Committee (with oversight by the Panel's Executive Committee), was charged with soliciting concerns and positions addressing reauthorization; formulating a position on issues and recommendations for the 2008 Reauthorization; and, preparing a proposal for the full Panel's consideration.

The Reauthorization Committee conversed with congressional staff; executive branch officials; leadership of NSGCP; leadership of the Sea Grant Association (SGA); and, the Panel's membership to identify issues related to the program and changes that could add capacity and greater effectiveness to what already is a dynamic and highly relevant research, education and extension program that addresses the nation's critical marine and coastal issues. These activities were followed by a sequence of interactions among the Committee, the Panel, the SGA and the NSGO.

The Panel met on Monday, July 16, 2007, by teleconference to consider a Draft Report of the Panel's Reauthorization Committee regarding the advice that the Panel will provide to NOAA during the development of the Administration's Reauthorization Bill. The Panel acted on the Committee's Draft Report on July 16, 2007, and what follows is a Panel-approved set of recommendations titled, **"Report of the National Sea Grant Review Panel on the 2008 Reauthorization of the National Sea Grant College Program (Statements of Issues, Recommendations and Rationale)"**.

We are pleased to share our advice on the 2008 Reauthorization of the National Sea Grant College Program with Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, NOAA Administrator; Dr. Richard W. Spinrad, Assistant Administrator for the NOAA Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research; Dr. Leon Cammen, Director of the National Sea Grant College Program; and with other Administration officials. We trust that these recommendations will be helpful and will add value to this process as the Administration's Bill is developed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(Recommendations at a Glance)

The National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel) is pleased to present its summarized recommendations for the 2008 Reauthorization Bill. The Panel's full report follows.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the Authorization/Appropriation levels for the National Sea Grant College Program be requested as follows:

A. 100,000,000 for fiscal year 2009	B. 105,000,000 for fiscal year 2010
C. 110,000,000 for fiscal year 2011	D. 115,000,000 for fiscal year 2012
E. 120,000,000 for fiscal year 2013	F. 125,000,000 for fiscal year 2014
- That the title of the Panel be changed from National Sea Grant Review Panel to “National Sea Grant Advisory Board.”
- That the Panel’s role be amended to include the following new provisions:
 - That the Panel advises on a fair and cost-effective program assessment and evaluation protocol.
 - That the Panel participates in the program assessment and evaluation processes for the Sea Grant Program.
 - That the Panel reports to the Congress every two years on the state of the National Sea Grant College Program and shall indicate the progress made towards meeting the priorities identified in the National Sea Grant Strategic Plan.
- That the Panel’s membership current 4-year term, with eligibility for reappointment, be maintained.
- That a provision be inserted in the Reauthorization Bill that allows the Panel the ability to include non-panel members via the establishment of subcommittees, for developing advice and exercising and carrying out Panel duties.
- That the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) administrative cap be increased to 7%.
- That an enabling non-match provision be added to the NSGO authority and ability to promote and encourage planning and implementation collaboration among clusters of Sea Grant Programs and strategic partners and stakeholders.
- That the NSGO be authorized to promote and encourage collaboration, technical expertise, and information and technology exchange with other nations, as long as scarce program dollars and essential NSGO staff allocated to address critical domestic issues not be diverted to international programming.

- That the provision in the current legislation that requires the NSGO to rank programs based on their relative performance be removed due to the disincentive for programs to work cooperatively and form partnerships.
- That the percentage of funds that can be awarded without match be increased from 1% to 5%, and that all Sea Grant Knauss Fellowship awards be exempted from the matching requirement.

Report of the National Sea Grant Review Panel
 on the
 2008 Reauthorization of the National Sea Grant College Program
 Statements of Issues, Recommendations and Rationale

1. **Budget Authorization/Appropriation**

Panel's Recommendation: The Panel recommends and supports the following authorization and appropriation levels and asks that the NOAA budget request for the National Sea Grant College Program be made accordingly:

- A. 100,000,000 for fiscal year 2009
- B. 105,000,000 for fiscal year 2010
- C. 110,000,000 for fiscal year 2011
- D. 115,000,000 for fiscal year 2012
- E. 120,000,000 for fiscal year 2013
- F. 125,000,000 for fiscal year 2014

Rationale: The demonstrated effectiveness of the National Sea Grant College Program in addressing the nation's critical marine and coastal issues merits growing investment. Further, the scope of issues and the relevance of the issues to our economic progress, national stature and personal health are becoming more evident as reflected in the reports of the Pew Oceans Commission and the U. S. Commission on Ocean Policy.

2. **Panel's Title**

Current Title: National Sea Grant Review Panel
Panel's Recommendation: **National Sea Grant Advisory Board**

Rationale: The Panel believes that "Advisory Board" is a more appropriate title as opposed to "Review Panel." The term "Panel" implies a more limited, ad hoc and less in-depth familiarity with the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP). Additionally, the proposed title, "National Sea Grant Advisory Board," reflects a broader and on-going responsibility on behalf of the NSGCP. Further, the change responds to National Research Council (NRC) recommendations.

3. **Panel's Role/Duties**

Panel's Recommendation: The new authorizing legislative language should be amended to read:

"The board shall advise the Secretary, the Undersecretary, and the Director concerning:

- A. *Strategies utilizing the sea grant college program to address the nation's highest priorities regarding the understanding, assessment, development, utilization, and conservation of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources and the environment.*
- B. *A fair and cost-effective program assessment and evaluation process.*

- C. *Participation in the program assessment and evaluation process for the sea grant program.*
- D. *Designation of sea grant colleges and institutes.*
- E. *Such other matters as the Secretary or the Director refer to the board for review or advice.*

The Secretary shall make available to the board such information, personnel, and administrative services and assistance as it may reasonably require carrying out its duties.”

Rationale: An understanding of Sea Grant’s challenges, emerging issues, strengths, and opportunities for program effectiveness is essential to making informed decisions on strategies and vision for the National Sea Grant College Program. The effectiveness and vitality of the National Sea Grant College Program is better served with a knowledgeable and visionary Advisory Board monitoring program accomplishments and relevance to emerging national marine and coastal issues.

Reviewing and advising on all major aspects of the National Sea Grant College Program is a core function of the Panel. Making recommendations and providing advice for ensuring a fair and cost-effective evaluation protocol and process is part-and-parcel to the Panel’s overall review and advisory role. It is important that this role/duty remains an independent core Panel function and not be subject to the request of the NSGCP Director or director of a sea grant college or sea grant institute.

It is the Panel’s position that the Panel’s involvement in Sea Grant program assessment processes ranging from advising on evaluation models and tools to participation in onsite reviews, has been invaluable to the overall improvement of the Sea Grant Network, and has been cost effective. The high quality, relatively low cost, and demonstrated success of the Panel’s involvement in improving programs is undisputable.

Panel’s Report to Congress: Further, we recommend that the following separate provision – not tied to the Panel’s advisory responsibility to the aforementioned Executive Branch entities – be added to address the Panel’s independent reporting to the U. S. Congress:

“That the board reports to the Congress every two years on the state of the national sea grant college program and shall indicate progress the program made towards meeting the priorities identified in the national sea grant strategic plan.”

Rationale: In order for the Panel to be well informed for the purpose of providing effective advice on the National Sea Grant College Program and strategic national program-level issues, and reporting to Congress on the state of the National Sea Grant College Program, the Panel must have opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge about the National Sea Grant College Program.

Providing Congress a third party assessment of program performance and accountability helps to insure a relevant and productive Sea Grant Program. Additionally, the interaction between the Panel (Board) and Congress will further the Panel’s capacity to guide the National Sea Grant College Program in addressing emerging critical national issues.

4. **Membership, Terms and Powers**

Panel’s Recommendation: The Panel supports the current legislative language that provides for a four year term of office with eligibility for reappointment.

Rationale: A change from a three to four year appointment was made during the last authorization. Among the reasons was the length of time required to become familiar with the scope and complexity of the program, given a biannual meeting schedule. The Panel is not aware of a problem that needs to/or will be solved by the NSGO suggested change.

Combining the expertise brought to the Board membership with an in-depth understanding of the legislative framework, operational policies and procedures, the institutional capacity of the designated colleges and the program impacts on critical issues, best serves the program and the responsibilities of the Board. The learning curve for a new board member is steep. Development of leadership to guide the Board and enough institutional memory for continuity of Board action requires both commitment and a measure of time.

The Panel, however, is in full accord with the perspectives concerning the need for a fully staffed, vibrant and engaged Panel with an ongoing infusion of new ideas. With timely appointments when members' terms expire, the Panel believes the current language provides the optimum balance between desired experience and program awareness on the one hand and infusion of new expertise and ideas on the other.

5. **Board's Ability to include non-Board Members for Developing Advice**

Panel's Recommendation: The Panel recommends that the following provision be inserted in the new authorizing legislation that enables the Panel (Board) to include non-panel members, via the establishment of subcommittees, for developing advice and exercising and carrying out Panel duties:

"The board may exercise such powers as are reasonably necessary in order to carry out its duties, including the establishment of subcommittees, which may include members external to the board."

Rationale: The Panel believes that the capacity to involve non-Panel members on subcommittees enables the Panel to engage the best relevant expertise for input on issues and thus strengthens the capacity of the Panel to provide well informed advice to the Secretary, NOAA Administrator, the NSGCP Director and to the U. S. Congress.

In the interest of providing the best possible guidance to the program, interaction with knowledgeable experts relevant to the issues under deliberation represents prudent action. We would hope that few if any constraints would inhibit our ability to consult and collaborate with the best available talent to address critical and complex national marine and coastal issues on which the Panel deliberates.

6. **Enhance Capabilities of the National Sea Grant Office: Increasing the Administrative Cap**

Panel's Recommendation: The Committee recommends support of an increase in the administrative cap from five (5) to seven (7) percent

Rationale: The Panel has thoughtfully addressed the staffing level within the NSGO on several occasions. In each case, concern was expressed that the diversity of expertise and capacity to guide, coordinate and support the college programs was seriously short of the optimum level. With the NRC recommending greater interaction between NSGO and the institutional programs and increased responsibility for more frequent systematic reviews of the programs, requirements for staff resources are substantially increased. At the same time, the Panel is concerned that growth in administrative

costs not outpace the growth of program dollars, restricting the capacity of the colleges to deliver relevant and effective programs.

If changes in the current processes for review of programs for continuing program improvement and program accountability are made consistent with the NRC report, careful attention to operational efficiencies and creative staff utilization will be needed to live within the seven (7) percent cap. A review of required NSGO activities, staffing and administrative operations and functions (update of the Duce Report, "**Building Sea Grant: The Role of the National Sea Grant Office**," released June 2002) should be conducted.

7. **Regional Programs**

Panel's Recommendation: The Panel supports that an enabling non-matching provision be added to the new authorizing legislation that gives the National Sea Grant College Program the ability to promote and encourage planning and implementation collaboration among clusters of Sea Grant Programs and strategic partners and stakeholders.

Rationale: The Panel supports the inclusion of new language that would describe in more detail the role of Sea Grant in addressing important issues of regional and national concern. The NSGO defines regional research and informational plans as plans that are, "Developed by sea grant colleges and institutes that identify regional priorities consistent with the National Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementing Strategy." Authorizing language encouraging interagency fund transfers and jointly funded inter-agency programs should stimulate greater regional collaboration and partnerships among universities, agencies and interest groups to more effectively address regional and national priorities. This initiative should also reduce duplication and therefore ensure that attention is paid to the greatest needs.

8. **Sea Grant International Programs**

Panel's Recommendation: The Panel supports that the addition of an enabling provision be included in the new authorizing legislation that gives the National Sea Grant College Program the ability to promote and encourage collaboration, technical expertise and information and technology exchange with other nations.

Rationale: Solutions to our country's pressing issues are frequently found, at least in part, in other countries or regions of the world. Further, expanding the expertise base and technological resources relevant to our pressing concerns serves our best interests.

Careful attention must be given to protect scarce program dollars allocated to address critical domestic issues from diversion to international activities. The Panel maintains a level of concern that essential NSGO staff and funding not be diverted to international programming, thereby depleting the existing stressed resources awarded to the domestic programs.

9. **Remove State Program Ranking Constraints**

Panel's Recommendation: The Panel recommends that the 2002 amendments to the Sea Grant legislation that require that programs be ranked based on their relative performance, and further require that certain funding decisions be made on the basis of programs' relative ranks, be removed.

Rationale: The current legislative language from the 2002 amendments has had the unintended consequence of building a disincentive for programs to work cooperatively and to form partnerships. In a time of emphasis to address more large scale regional issues through multi-institution and multiple agency collaboration, systems that reward or at least are neutral concerning program cooperation, best serve the public interest.

Implementation of additional measures for program review and policies advancing “continuous program improvement,” building on the current rigorous program evaluation and review processes, should effectively address the NRC recommendations calling for still more intense and frequent program assessments. The Panel remains firmly committed to the support of efficient and effective programs that are accountable and responsive to the priority concerns of the public.

The Panel concurs with the NSGO’s intent to retain the reference to “evaluate and rate” the performance of state Sea Grant programs, via whatever process emerges from the NRC response, while requesting removal of the relative ranking requirement.

10. **Increase NOAA’s ability to make Sea Grant Awards without Requiring Matching Funds**

Panel’s Recommendation: The Panel recommends that the new authorizing legislation increases the percent of funds that may be awarded without match from the current 1% to 5%, and that the Sea Grant Knauss Fellowship Program be fully exempt from having to match grant awards.

Rationale: Many Sea Grant programs address issues of local as well as national concern. As such, the general match requirement is appropriate. In addition, it multiplies the federal investment in critical issues and measures the relevance of the programs to state and local populations.

However, the level of required match has made it difficult for Sea Grant to participate in joint competitive programs with other NOAA offices or other agencies due to the constraint that incoming proposals for Sea Grant funding require a match while proposals from the other agencies do not.

The requirement that legislative Knauss Fellowship awards must be matched has no logical basis since the state programs derive no real benefit from the fellows’ activities. In addition, since awards to executive branch fellows do not require match (because they are supported with funds from other agencies), the treatment of legislative fellows is inconsistent.

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