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## A Report to the National Sea Grant Review Panel [a FACA panel]

I have gathered data on the Sea Grant program over the last several weeks with the goal of addressing NSGRP's role. I have talked with the SG Program Office, SGA, Panel members, Hill staffers, NOAA leadership, host institutions leadership and Administration officials. I have participated in three program assessment teams and gained knowledge of SG from my position at CORE representing the ocean research and education community. These are my observations and open to further review and discussion.

The role of a Federal Advisory Committee Act committee is widely acknowledged in the federal system. I have been told there are over 5000 serving federal programs. It is the 'experienced and respected members' of a FACA committee that brings the credible 'stamp of approval' to a program.

The national SG program is a good investment of public funds to advance ocean research, education and outreach. It has not seen the growth in funding that it deserves. The attached graph addresses a comment made by a couple of folks who thought that SG suffers from being in NOAA and the lack of an overall increase in NOAA funding. As you can see, NOAA's top-line has almost doubled over the last 10 years while SG has remained relatively flat.

The challenge for SG is to ***determine the reasons for this lack of increase in funding and general support from the federal system.*** My assessment is that there are two fundamental problems facing SG:

1. The first is a lack of SG mission unity among the major stakeholder groups having a say in the direction of the SG program (NOAA, SGA and the NSGRP). In my short review period, there were several examples of these groups being at odds and debating the role of each in supporting SG. This leads to what I term 'congressional confusion', an easy excuse for the Hill to 'put-aside' support for SG until there is a strong and united voice for a "national SG program".
2. The second major obstacle facing SG is the perception that it is not a competitive program, but merely a "block grant to the states". Several folks in the federal system, indicated to me that SG was not a truly competitive program. Some even cited the fact that one program was decertified and one program has been on probation for several years – and both programs continue to receive funding.

## **General SG observations;**

The SG Program is a good investment of public money in ocean research, education and outreach; unfortunately funding levels have remained flat over the last 10 years. To reverse this trend, SG must **better compete for public funding**. This will take a ‘team effort’ and I consider this team to be the fed sponsor Commerce/NOAA, the NSGO, the NSGRP and the SGA. Right now these groups are not working together with the ultimate goal of making SG an important ‘national program’.

There are many examples of good individual programs, some unique, some making great strides in addressing regional coast and ocean issues. There are also some programs not doing so well and the perception is that SG leadership is not taking decisive action to correct or eliminate under-performing programs. It was also reported by some, with concern, that the overall ratio of research to education/outreach was changing in favor of outreach. Some also stated that SG leadership has failed to ensure the goals of the individual programs support a NSGO sponsored national strategy.

In my opinion, SG should reside in NOAA; as NOAA is our operational ocean agency. NOAA has its challenges but there are a lot of folks working hard on that. NOAA has not fully recognized or embraced the role of SG. SG is rarely mentioned by NOAA leadership as it relates to the research/science, education and outreach goals for NOAA. SG programs are good ‘ambassadors for NOAA’; out in the field, working with the public and addressing ocean and coastal issues on behalf of NOAA...

Not responding to the NRC report in a timely manner was a mistake. Some took this as failure of SG program leadership within NOAA.

Perception by the Administration and the Hill that SG is not a ‘competitive program’ prevails. This perception, real or not, has to be addressed and turned-around ASAP. The federal system generally does not support programs that are not competitive. The Hill and OMB want to see a rigorous evaluation and ranking of SG programs with appropriate action taken by NOAA/NSGO...

I did not have time to evaluate the current ‘earmark’ reforms being worked on the Hill and its affect on SG programs although from my PAT experience, I think this impact will vary among programs.

The friction between the Program Office, SGA and the NSGRP on acknowledging their roles in support of a national program are known and add to the perception that SG is not well structured and working toward a program important to the nation.

Folks familiar with SG acknowledge the important and successful role of the NSGRP to formalize evaluation of a collection of diverse programs over the last few years. The ‘PAT’ process ‘raised the level of performance across all programs’.

## **NSGRP Observations;**

NSGRP has had its advisory role reduced due to its extensive involvement in the program assessment process. This has limited the Panel's time available to address other pressing SG challenges. The NSGO needs to engage the Panel in developing, maintaining and conducting a revised national evaluation plan.

NSGRP has not had a systematic turn-over in membership per governing documents. This has added to a negative opinion of the FACA by some in both the Administration and on the Hill. There are bureaucratic issues within NOAA that are partly to blame but the Panel should insist on support for timely replacement of outgoing Panel members.

It is my FACA-experienced opinion that the NSGRP has been curtailed in its advisory role by miss-guided interpretation of FACA rules. I will continue to work this issue with the NSGO and update the Panel as progress is made. What ever happened to the common sense rule!?!?

The NSGRP should challenge the current interpretation by the Program Office that the only official work by the FACA has to be in a public forum. This interpretation would eliminate most work that I have done on FACAs and doesn't pass the common sense test in my opinion. We are special gov't employees in and out of public session when working assigned NSGRP tasks, the products are public knowledge. I will continue my research on this topic.

The NSGRP is not being used by the Program Office to deal with the challenges facing SG. The experience, diversity and collective respect of the Panel members has not been brought to bear in support of the overall SG program. Has the Panel been tasked to study why SG funding has declined over the last few years?

The NSGRP working relationship with the NSGO and the SGA is not where it should be and this 'lack of unity in promoting a national SG program' is recognized by the federal system.

The current governance structure of NSGRP contributes to a lack of full Panel participation and input on some Panel issues. Panel sub-committees are appropriate for certain tasks and should be used to optimize the Panel talent base but should be terminated upon completion of the task. Sub-committees that include non-FACA members are appropriate but have some FACA rule restrictions. The full Panel should be kept aware of all sub-committee activities as the final product is from the full FACA Panel.

The NSGRP Charter and Procedures Manual should be reviewed and updated

In summary, I believe that the SG community can and must reverse the decline of SG funding. We can design a strategy to a sustainable future if we act quickly and together. The federal system is structured to make public funded programs a success; we need to reinvigorate our part in that structure. I recommend our Panel spend a half-day at the next meeting to specifically discuss Panel mission and the required revisions to governing documents.

Respectfully,

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