

NSGRP NRC Report Implementation Committee

Preliminary/Draft Transmittal Letter

Director, National Sea Grant College Program

Sir:

On behalf of the National Sea Grant Review Panel (NSGRP), we are pleased to provide our preliminary comments and implementation recommendations that address the National Research Council (NRC) Report, "Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process"; June, 2006 ("2006 NRC Report").

These recommendations were prepared by the NSGRP NRC Report Implementation Committee Co-Chaired by Dr. Frank Kudrna (former Panel Chair; Chair, Program Evaluation Committee) and Dr. John Toll (former Panel Chair; Chair, Toll Committee). Other Subcommittee members include Dr. Robert Duce (Chair, Duce Committee), Mr. Jeffrey Stephan, (former Panel Chair; Duce Committee member; Program Evaluation Committee), Dr. William Stubblefield (Duce Committee), Dr Peter Bell, (former Panel Chair; Program Evaluation Committee), Dr. Geraldine Knatz, (former Panel Chair), and Dr John Byrne (former NOAA Administrator). Collectively this group has participated in approximately seventy-five PATs.

First let us say that the current Program Assessment Team (PAT) process, which is a direct result of the NRC Report, "A Review of the NOAA National Sea Grant College Program" ("1994 NRC Report"), is exemplary, and is being utilized as a model process by other parts of the federal government (NIH, EPA). Development of the PAT process was a significant factor in the recognition of Dr. Ron Baird, the most recent past Director of the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP), as a recipient of the Presidential Rank Award.

The 2006 NRC Report provides recommendations to further improve this already high quality evaluation process. We concur with the majority of the recommendations contained in the 2006 NRC Report; however, we have alternate recommendations in some cases.

Major response issues considered by this Committee regarding the 2006 NRC Report:

- 1) Sea Grant in the past and in the current fiscal year is facing serious budget reductions. Implementation of many of the NRC Recommendations would require increased financial resources. The U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA and Congress must provide additional resources to fully implement the NRC Recommendations.
- 2) We have serious questions regarding the recommendation for a "transparent annual assessment" as proposed in the NRC Report. It is unclear whether this review will add value without greatly increasing the burden for the individual Sea Grant Programs, or for the National Sea Grant Office.

- 3) The PAT Reviews should be continued. The process has evolved over the past 10 years, and continues to do so. We believe the direct involvement of the National Sea Grant Review Panel in the PAT Reviews has contributed significantly to the high quality of the National Sea Grant College Program, and should be continued.
- 4) Strategic/Long Range Planning is important to the success of the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP). Plans should be consistent with and supportive of the National Sea Grant Strategic Plan. We recommend that the Strategic Planning process be separated from, and precede, the PAT Process. Individual Strategic Plans should be developed in consultation with the National Sea Grant Office, working with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, and be approved by the NSGO or the Director of the NSGCP. Further, the Benchmarks and Indicators of Progress that are contained in the individual Strategic Plans should be integrated throughout the sub-elements of the PAT grading of individual Sea Grant Programs. Individual Strategic Plans should be developed and approved concurrently by NSGO.
- 5) We note that it has been nine months since the 2006 NRC Report was issued. The NSGCP Director previously committed to implement the revised Program Evaluations process in 2008 after taking 1.5 years for the purpose of reviewing and implementing the NRC recommendations. Since the 2006 NRC Report was mandated by Congress, we feel it is critical that the NSGO accelerate the process of reviewing and implementing the 2006 NRC Report, and that the NSGO maintain the previous commitment to this timetable so as to demonstrate NOAA's responsiveness to Congress.

In addition we have provided recommendations previously submitted by the NSGRP Program Evaluation Committee ("Review and Recommendations: Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee"; November 17, 2005). The Report from the NSGRP Program Evaluation Committee, and the recommendations that are included therein, were adopted by the full NSGRP, and transmitted to the Director of the NSGCP. The previous Director of the NSGCP asked that these recommendations be held until the conclusion of the 2nd PAT cycle. The recommendations that deal with Re-competition/Recertification/Decertification/Re-designation are meant to address previous concerns that have been expressed by OMB, DOC and NOAA.

We are pleased to further discuss any of these recommendations at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Nathaniel E. Robinson, Chairman
National Sea Grant Review Panel

cc: Assistant Administrator, Oceanic and Atmospheric Research/ NOAA