



NOAA's National Ocean Service

## ROUNDTABLES

# SUMMARY: PROMOTING OCEAN AWARENESS *and a STEWARDSHIP ETHIC*

**O**n Tuesday, May 18, 2004, National Ocean Service (NOS) Assistant Administrator Richard W. Spinrad, PhD, hosted the sixth NOS Constituent Roundtable, "Promoting Ocean Awareness and a Stewardship Ethic," at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, DC. Twenty constituents, primarily representing major education and outreach partners of NOS, joined Dr. Spinrad, in addition to eight representatives of NOS and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Ocean Council. Following is a summary of the major points discussed at the roundtable.

### Opening Remarks

In his opening remarks, Dr. Spinrad welcomed the group and noted that promoting ocean awareness and a stewardship ethic is a cross-cutting priority of NOAA's strategic plan to achieve environmental literacy, outreach, and education. Dr. Spinrad discussed the budget process for FY'04, '05 and '06, and explained that the agency's budget request was based on NOAA's strategic plan. Dr. Spinrad discussed the Global Earth Observing System of Systems (GEOSS) and ocean observation activities. Finally, he commented on the agency's education and outreach efforts, including NOAA's involvement in the recent Smithsonian Folklife Festival and planning for the upcoming Smithsonian Oceans Hall.

Dr. Spinrad introduced Marlene Kaplan of the NOAA Office of Education and Sustainable Development. Ms. Kaplan reiterated the importance of education and outreach as a cross-cutting NOAA priority. She discussed the past, current and future development of the Office of Education and Sustainable Development and outlined the office's relationship with NOAA's Education Council. She informed the group of NOAA's new policy on education that requires all strategic plan mission goals to include education components.

Before turning the floor over to the constituents, Dr. Spinrad mentioned the United States Commission on Ocean Policy and its preliminary report, and noted that June 4, 2004, was the deadline for public comment. Dr. Spinrad noted that currently, only four offices in NOAA – the National Marine Sanctuary Program, National Estuarine Research Reserve System, Sea Grant, and Coral Reef Task Force – are mandated to conduct educational activities. Thus, the public has an important opportunity to foster the role of formal and informal education in addressing the challenges confronting the ocean community.

### Constituent Observations

Participants addressed how NOS could help build national and international capacity for ocean education and outreach. Three common themes were identified, including the need to (1) clearly define the audience for ocean education messages; (2) produce education and outreach products and their delivery mechanisms; and (3) maximize partnerships to achieve education objectives.

#### *Target Audience for Ocean Literacy*

Participants identified the need to clearly define the audience before education and outreach initiatives can be conducted. The difficulty is that, in terms of an "ocean literate" nation, the ocean community needs to empower



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all people to understand their own impacts on oceans and how they can contribute to a better future. While NOS should reach a general audience that is broad and inclusive, specific education programs must target specialized audiences to achieve measurable results. Constituents noted many targeted-audience education programs within their own organizations that are successful in increasing ocean literacy through specific markets, such as K-12 students, resource managers, and visitors to museums, zoos, and aquaria.

The participants agreed that all children should be taught to foster ocean conservation, and be given opportunities to experience the world of oceanography first-hand. Several constituents noted that the ocean community should also focus on increasing diversity in the ocean workforce.

Finally, participants noted that a strength of ocean education is its interdisciplinary nature. Ocean education has the potential to be taught and discussed in a number of contexts, and to various audiences with differing perspectives and interests.

#### ***Education Products and Delivery***

A significant theme of the roundtable focused on current and future products and delivery mechanisms, including technology to help promote an ocean stewardship ethic. With the advance of weather data, ocean current simulators, GIS software and training, real-time video links, and enviro-casts, ocean educators have a multitude of presentation formats available to them. Used effectively, these technologies can promote ocean education in ways that impart lifelong lessons. Additionally, participants noted the need to connect scientists and teachers to improve the sharing of knowledge from the laboratory to the classroom.

#### ***Partnerships***

Constituents noted that the ocean community could more effectively achieve national ocean literacy through partnerships and coordinated efforts. A visible effort to promote ocean stewardship, including formal and informal education venues, can present a unified ocean stewardship message. Constituents noted the lack of a united “ocean voice” and suggested that NOAA assume a leadership role in coordinating ocean education. They also noted that if an ocean-literate society is to be achieved, the ocean community must take a holistic approach to promoting ocean education and a stewardship ethic.

#### **Closing Comments**

Education is an essential part of ocean stewardship. It is not enough to govern our oceans in isolation; stewardship implies that we are striving to achieve a sustainable future for the ocean realm. We must communicate the importance of responsible ocean governance to those who will be doing the governing in the future. Ocean literacy will foster a citizenry that takes personal responsibility for maintaining healthy ecosystems and protecting natural resources in the public trust. We must inspire young people to possess a vested interest in the oceans, just as students of the last generation were inspired by NASA’s Earth orbits and its mission to the moon.

Dr. Spinrad and Ms. Kaplan thanked the attendees for their participation and summarized the morning’s discussion. Dr. Spinrad also urged the NOAA Ocean Council and the NOAA Education Council to jointly discuss these themes and to maintain a dialogue between NOS and its stakeholders in striving for an ocean-literate society.