



NOAA's National Ocean Service

ROUNDTABLES

SUMMARY: MARINE TRANSPORTATION, MARITIME SAFETY, and CHARTING AND NAVIGATION

On December 3, 2003, Richard W. Spinrad, Ph.D., Assistant Administrator of NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS), hosted the first in a series of constituent roundtables on NOS programs and initiatives. The roundtable focused on marine transportation, maritime safety, charting and navigation, and related NOS products and services. Five NOS office directors attended, along with 16 constituents representing the private sector, maritime associations, environmental groups, and ports and vessel operators.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Spinrad discussed NOAA's strategic plan, the NOAA Research Review Team draft report, and NOAA's new Program Planning, Budgeting and Execution System (PPBES) process. He noted that the upcoming release of the report from the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy will offer a unique opportunity to engage the public in ocean concerns. He also described NOAA's Ocean Council, which is reviewing agency programs in anticipation of the release of the commission's report, and presented his vision of NOS as the global leader in integrated management of the oceans.

Dr. Spinrad noted that much of the work that NOS conducts is critically dependent on ocean observation, modeling and ecological forecasting. He summarized current initiatives, including the Earth Observation Summit, follow-up by the Group on Earth Observations, and interagency activities. He described how ocean observation and modeling support marine transportation, and said that we needed improved models to facilitate better decision making in both the public and private sectors.

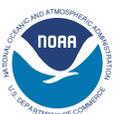
NOS represents the U.S. Department of Commerce in the Interagency Committee on the Marine Transportation System (ICMTS). The Department believes that the ICMTS plays an important role in improving the nation's marine transportation system. Dr. Spinrad outlined FY 2004 budget issues, and summarized appropriations for NOS programs. Later in the meeting, he highlighted the importance of public- and private-sector partnerships, and discussed the newly established Hydrographic Services Review Panel that will advise the NOAA Administrator on hydrographic surveying, nautical charts, and related matters.

Constituent Observations

Observation and Modeling that Support Commerce and Transportation

Several participants commented on the key role of the Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS,) in supporting marine navigation. They urged NOAA to continue to support the installation and expansion of the system. They also encouraged NOS to work with port authorities and other users to explore imaginative ways of funding PORTS and maintaining its long-term viability.

Participants emphasized emerging technologies, and several constituents felt that NOAA needs to better coordinate its activities with the private sector. Several praised NOAA's height modernization efforts. They recommended the development of a national and/or regional program supported by base funding instead of earmarked appropriations. One participant suggested that NOAA could use its observation capabilities to



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monitor and respond to vessel discharge violations. Another participant recommended that NOAA use its ocean observing systems to monitor water quality, contaminants and floating debris.

Products and Services that Support Safe Navigation

Roundtable participants stressed the importance of precise navigation and in maintaining the accuracy of NOAA's navigation products. Participants identified electronic navigational charts and raster charts as extremely valuable products, and urged NOS to keep them current and affordable. Several constituents also requested that NOS continue to support paper charts, which are still widely used by recreational boaters and fishermen.

Several participants thought that NOAA should focus additional attention on providing current sounding data in the vicinity of port facilities. Others mentioned that NOAA needs to address the hydrographic survey backlog. Because they have tremendous investments in vessels and cargo, owners and operators are concerned about the potential for losses due to factors outside of their control (e.g., inaccurate charts). All available environmental and navigation data must be integrated to ensure a viable marine transportation system. One constituent stressed that skilled professionals in the private sector could collect data that support NOAA's navigation services programs. He asked NOAA to consider an expanded role for the private sector in data-collection efforts.

Coastal Resource Management, Environment and Port Development

Several participants raised environmental concerns and noted that coastal resource managers need ready access to socioeconomic data, including information on population trends, travel and tourism, transportation, and land conservation. Several constituents urged NOAA to continue to maintain an environmental focus in its support of the marine transportation system and port infrastructure development. NOAA should consider the concerns of the tourism and recreational boating communities, and environmental and socioeconomic impacts, when making dredging decisions. Several participants noted that NOAA's concerns are the same as those of coastal states, and better coordination is required.

Closing Comments

Dr. Spinrad summarized several themes that emerged during the discussions. He highlighted the fact that constituent relations are important to NOS, and said the agency would continue to focus on public- and private-sector concerns. He noted that NOS needs to re-engage those constituents with whom the agency has lost touch, and commented on the opportunity to work with constituents in planning processes. Recognizing that constituent interests are diverse, Dr. Spinrad said NOS should not presume to know all of them. He concluded that NOS and its constituent communities share many interests, and that it is important to work together to identify and address common goals.