

**COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

HEARING CHARTER

National Sea Grant College Program Act: H.R. 5618

Wednesday, May 21, 2008
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
2325 Rayburn House Office Building

Purpose

On Wednesday, May 21, 2008 the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment of the Committee on Science and Technology will hold a hearing to receive testimony on H.R. 5618, the *National Sea Grant College Program Amendments Act of 2008*.

H.R. 5618, introduced by Representative Bordallo (D-GU) Chair of the Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans, reauthorizes and amends the National Sea Grant College Program Act. The purpose of the hearing is to receive testimony on H.R. 5618, the National Sea Grant College Program Act of 2008.

The hearing will focus on the legislation to reauthorize the National Sea Grant Program through fiscal year 2014. The hearing will also examine the program's major accomplishments, program activities, and the effectiveness of the extension and outreach aspects of the program.

Witnesses

- **Mr. Paul Anderson, President, Sea Grant Association and Director, Maine Sea Grant College Program**, will represent the institutions through the association of the 32 Sea Grant Programs from around the nation. He will discuss the importance of supporting the National Sea Grant College Program, as well as the program's activities, accomplishments, contribution to NOAA's mission, and offer recommendations on how to strengthen the research, education and training components of the program.
- **Mr. Patrick Riley, General Manager of Western Seafood, Freeport, TX**, will represent the partners and stakeholders of the National Sea Grant College Program and the use of information generated through the programs extension and outreach efforts.
- **Mr. Craig McLean, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Programs & Administration, Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)** will discuss the mission and importance of the Sea Grant Program, future plans for the program, programmatic issues, and issues the agency would like to see addressed in the bill.

- **Mr. M. Richard DeVoe, Executive Director, South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium,** will discuss the South Carolina Sea Grant program and its relationship to the overall Sea Grant program and summarize key recommendations.

Background

The National Sea Grant College Program (Sea Grant) was established in 1966 by the National Sea Grant College Program Act (33 U.S.C. §1121-1131). It was last reauthorized in 2002. The Sea Grant Program is intended to be the marine, coastal, and Great Lakes counterpart to the Land Grant College system which serves the agricultural research and extension needs of each state. Each of the 32 Sea Grant programs works with the National Sea Grant office in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the coastal community in their state or territory to develop research priorities to promote sustainable use and management of coastal or Great Lakes resources. The Sea Grant program is supported through a combination of federal appropriations and through state appropriations and in-kind contributions.

The Sea Grant program is comprised of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Sea Grant Office (NSGO), 32 university-based state programs, the National Sea Grant Review Panel, a National Law Center, a National Sea Grant Library and hundreds of participating institutions.

The Sea Grant network addresses key issues and opportunities in areas such as aquaculture, aquatic nuisance species, marine biotechnology, seafood safety, fisheries management, coastal business and development, coastal habitat, water quality, and coastal hazards. Sea Grant conducts priority-driven research, transfers scientific results to the public, provides educational opportunities from K-12 to graduate degrees, and conducts successful outreach programs. Sea Grant is a partnership among academia, government, and the private sector and uses a combination of research, education and outreach to improve management of the coastal, marine, and Great Lakes environment.

The National Ocean Research Priorities Plan (ORPP)

The National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) established a Joint Subcommittee on Oceans in 2003. At the direction of the President's Ocean Action Plan, this group was expanded in 2005 to include Science and Technology (JSOST). The JSOST reports to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources in addition to the Interagency Committee on Ocean Science and Resource Management Integration (ICOSRMI). JSOST developed the National Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy and released it in January 2007. The ORPP was designed to establish priorities for ocean science and technology for the next decade. Using this new interagency priorities plan for ocean science, the National Sea Grant Office in NOAA and the Sea Grant colleges nationwide have developed a new strategic plan that links Sea Grant's priorities with the larger interagency effort.

The ORPP provides guidance on how the various ocean science sectors (government, academia, industry, and non-government entities) can and should be engaged, individually or through partnerships, to address the areas of greatest research need and opportunity. Given the magnitude of the task, the report established priorities at a relatively high level and the

implementation strategies were not detailed. Of specific interest to Sea Grant is that one of the actions identified in the Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources' (SIMOR) 2006 work plan is for Sea Grant's university network to facilitate the development of Regional Research and Information Plans. These Regional Plans will outline one mechanism for regional ORPP implementation and identify the top research and information priorities.

National Academy of Sciences Evaluation

The National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002 directed NOAA to contract with the National Research Council to evaluate Sea Grant's process of reviewing individual programs and recommend ways to improve the overall effectiveness of the evaluation process to ensure fairness, consistency, and enhancement of performance. The National Academy of Sciences completed its review in 2006 and issued its report, *Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process*.

The 2006 report recommended:

- strengthening the strategic planning process for the individual programs,
- increasing the interaction between the National Sea Grant Office and the individual programs, and
- improving the program rating and ranking process through annual assessments by the national office.

The Report commented on the importance of improving strategic planning. Some individual Sea Grant programs have developed strategic plans that reflect active collaboration with the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) as well as its local constituents. However, other individual Sea Grant programs have been slow to develop strategic plans or have strategic plans that are poorly designed, poorly integrated with the national strategic plan, or lack specificity for addressing local and regional needs.

The peer review and assessment process of the Sea Grant program evolved significantly since its inception. The National Academy Report discusses the evolution of the evaluation process and makes recommendations to bring balance to the process with regards to appropriately directed competition and development of a robust national program whose foundation is the network of local programs created and maintained by individual Sea Grant colleges and institutions and administered by the NSGO.

The NAS report suggests there should be a balance in the assessment process with regard to producing improvement in the individual Sea Grant programs while also encouraging its strengths. The panel questions the benchmarks used in the evaluations and whether they are sufficiently ambitious. If the benchmarks are designed to reflect annually updated, quantitative measures of the significance and impact of research, outreach, and education activities, it would be easier to contrast program performance relative to other programs and to the program's past performance. The report also states that the evaluation criteria currently used do not adequately emphasize the importance of network building among individual programs and how such activities help to link the local and regional efforts into an effective nationwide program.

Some aspects of the current program evaluation process and ranking appear to have fostered an increase in competition and lowered the level of cooperation between individual Sea Grant programs. The Academy panel concluded that this tendency was not consistent with efforts to build a cooperative nationwide effort.¹

Changes to the Sea Grant Program in H.R. 5618

H.R. 5618 reauthorizes the National Sea Grant College Program and amends several sections of the law including sections related to the interaction between the National Sea Grant Office and the individual programs; programmatic performance reviews; and strategic planning. A number of the changes are technical or clarifying in nature or alter specific cost-sharing or cost allocation formulas. A Section-by-Section of the bill is included below.

The Findings are amended by including reference to the National Ocean Research Priorities Plan and pointing to the Sea Grant program as the most appropriate program for carrying out the priorities listed in the Plan.

The bill would amend the law by adding two new definitions. The first is a “regional research and information plan” which expands Sea Grant’s role to include regional and national projects conducted by two or more Sea Grant institutions. The second is the “National Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy” which is a plan issued by the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST).

In the 2002 authorization, our Committee amended the Sea Grant review process to require the Director to evaluate each Sea Grant institute’s performance and then to place the institutes into one of five categories based on their performance rating. This ranking was then to be used as the basis for allocating funding among the institutes with the best performing being rewarded with any increased appropriations made available. H.R. 5618 repeals this provision. The Director is still required to evaluate and assess the institutes.

H.R. 5618 designates the Sea Grant Review Panel as the National Sea Grant Advisory Board. The duties of the Board are to advise the Secretary and the Director on strategies for utilizing Sea Grant institutes to address ocean, coastal and Great Lakes issues; on the designation of new Sea Grant institutes; and any other matter the Secretary refers to the Board.

H.R. 5618 authorizes increases in funding levels from \$66 million in fiscal year 2009 to \$100 million in fiscal year 2014. This is a significant yet measured improvement over the approximately \$57 million that the program has been allocated over recent years.

¹ National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council. *Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process*. (2006) <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11670.html>.

H.R. 5618 SECTION BY SECTION

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE

Section 1 entitles the legislation as the “National Sea Grant College Program Amendments Act of 2008.”

SECTION 2. REFERENCES

Section 2 clarifies that all amendment references in the legislation are made to the National Sea Grant College Program Act (33 U.S.C. 1121 et seq.).

SECTION 3. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES

Section 3 amplifies the extension aspects of the Sea Grant program and cites the relevance of the National Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy to the Sea Grant Program.

SECTION 4. DEFINITIONS

Section 4 defines key terms included within the text of the proposed legislation, including ‘regional research and information plan’ and ‘National Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy’ where they appear in the bill.

SECTION 5. NATIONAL SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM, GENERALLY

Section 5 amends the Program Elements to expand Sea Grant programs to include regional and national projects among Sea Grant institutions and to add regional strategic investments in projects undertaken through Sea grant projects. Section 5 also augments the functions of the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program to include encouraging collaborations among Sea Grant colleges and institutions. This section also strikes the Sea Grant program performance ranking system for allocating additional resources on the basis of performance.

SECTION 6. PROGRAM OR PROJECT GRANTS AND CONTRACTS

Section 6 exempts the Dean John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship Program from having to match grant awards in order to achieve parity between fellows placed in Congressional offices with those fellows placed in federal agencies.

This section also increases the percentage of funds exempt from the non-federal match requirement from the current 1 percent to 5 percent.

SECTION 7. EXTENSION SERVICES BY SEA GRANT COLLEGES AND SEA GRANT INSTITUTES

Section 7 clarifies that one of the requirements for designation includes an extension program (as opposed to an “advisory service”).

SECTION 8. TECHNICAL CORRECTION RELATING TO FELLOWSHIPS

Section 8 updates the statutory language requiring a report every two years on efforts to include minority and economically disadvantaged students.

SECTION 9. NATIONAL SEA GRANT ADVISORY BOARD

Section 9 expands the responsibilities of the National Sea Grant Review Panel, renaming the panel as the “National Sea Grant Advisory Board” to more appropriately and accurately describe its purpose and function.

SECTION 10. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS

Section 10 increases authorized funding levels from \$66 million to \$100 million for the period between Fiscal Year 2009 through Fiscal Year 2014.