



July 21, 2004

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman, Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6125

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter provides the views of the Department of Commerce (Department) on S. 2280, a bill to establish a coordinated national ocean exploration program within the Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The purposes of the program include ocean exploration, facilitation of discovery, and public education.

NOAA's dedicated ocean exploration program is complemented by those activities of other Federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the Department of the Interior, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Department of Defense. In addition, other programs within NOAA contribute to ocean discovery and a greater understanding of our oceans. The funding and language in S. 2280 would support the current activities of the NOAA Ocean Exploration Program, however, the bill might not include NOAA's other ocean exploration and underwater research activities. The Department would welcome an opportunity to discuss with the Committee the possibility of including these other closely related activities. The Department recommends several changes to specific sections of the bill.

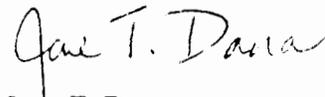
While we agree with the goal of section 5, to promote coordination, we recommend deletion of such a statutory requirement. Such a requirement is unnecessary. We would be happy to discuss with you or your staff how NOAA currently coordinates with other Federal agencies on ocean exploration activities and plans for the future. If, however, the section is not deleted it should be amended to substitute the U.S. Geological Survey with the Department of the Interior, substitute the Office of Naval Research with the Department of Defense, and to include the National Science Foundation.

Section 7 authorizes appropriations to carry out the program in the amount of \$45 million for each of fiscal years 2005 through 2010, and in the amount of \$55 million for each of fiscal years 2011 through 2016. The Administration requests that the authorization levels in the bill be consistent with the FY 2005 President's Budget. The Budget provides \$11.24 million for the NOAA Ocean Exploration Program in FY 2005.

The Honorable John McCain
Page 2

The Office of Management and Budget has advised that there is no objection to the transmittal of this letter from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jare T. Dana". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a distinct "D".

Jare T. Dana
Acting General Counsel

cc: The Honorable Ernest F. Hollings
Ranking Member