

# An Open Letter to the Presidential Commission on Ocean Policy

James A. Yoder

National Science Foundation • Arlington, Virginia USA

Dear Commissioners,

Congratulations on your selection to this important commission! Many of us are very excited by the potential of the commission and will follow its activities and deliberations with high interest. The activities and report of the previous presidential commission, Stratton Commission (see *Oceanography*, Vol 14[2]), led to some very significant developments for ocean science and policy, such as the National Sea Grant College Program, the creation of NOAA, the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 and a significant increase in the federal marine science budget. We hope the recommendations from your commission will have a similar impact, and I believe they will.

Congress' Oceans Act of 2000 created your commission and asked it to hold public meetings throughout the U.S., culminating in a report of findings and recommendations to Congress and the President. The bill gives you a broad mandate to develop a comprehensive national ocean policy that will promote responsible stewardship of ocean resources including fisheries; protection of the marine environment; and expansion of ocean knowledge, including the role of the oceans in climate; and more. You will be involved in complex and controversial issues and yet you only have 18 months to submit your report! Your Chairman, Admiral Jim Watkins, will have his hands full keeping you focused on the task at hand.

There are many important topics for the commission to consider including fisheries management, marine conservation, and Law of the Sea. Most TOS members are involved in ocean education and research, and we hope the commission spends time on our issues as well. Many need attention or at least some "light" focused on them by the Commission. To cite just two examples: The Federal Oceanographic Facilities Committee (FOFC), with help from the University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS), is developing a plan for renewal of the national academic research fleet. The plan (now in draft form) discusses future trends in ocean science and recommends a mix of global, ocean, regional and local classes of ships that could meet the research requirements anticipated for the next 20 years or so. The plan requires new resources not yet identified in the federal budget. Commissioners, if the plan seems

reasonable to you, help us raise its visibility on the national agenda.

Routine ocean observations for practical applications, as well as for research purposes, are of increasing interest to U.S. oceanographers. Planning meetings are being held, pilot programs are in place and a national planning office is now supported by the National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP) (see <http://www.ocean.us.net/>). Although rapidly gaining support among federal agencies as well as among university-based oceanographers, "ocean observations" needs some attention from you as well. For example, who should/will coordinate the U.S. contribution to an observational network: a federal agency, a partnership or a new entity? Will there be a role, as there should be, for university oceanographers and for universities? What opportunities will there be to infuse new technologies into an operational system? How will data be disseminated and to whom? What is the correct balance of funding between private, state and federal sources? Many of the details are beyond the scope of the commission, and no one expects the commission to actually develop the national plan. However, the commission could give the community some high-level guidance on the issues raised above, clarify an appropriate mission for an ocean observations network, and of course raise its need to a higher level of national visibility. Many believe this could be one of your important legacies.

In summary, good luck with your regional meetings and deliberations and call on us when you need our help. And don't forget ocean research and education!

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the National Science Foundation.

