

The Next Steps

I WAS RIFFLING through an unruly pile of old journals recently, looking for an article I remembered reading in *Oceanography* (all copies faithfully saved, unfaithfully organized and shelved). Like many people inside the Beltway and around the country, a new dimension has been added to my job—that of responding to the report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (USCOP). The article that I recalled reading in *Oceanography* was about the Stratton Commission, which issued its report in 1969. That commission resulted in several significant outcomes, including the formation of NOAA and the EPA. Parallels have been drawn between the establishment, work, findings, and recommendations of the two commissions; I was curious to see from history what might be the next steps in following up on the USCOP report once the final version was submitted. (For a more complete synopsis of the USCOP and its possible ramifications, see the commentary by Briccoe and others in the September 2004 issue of *Oceanography* 17[3]:6-11).

The Oceans Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-256) formed the USCOP, which began its work in September 2001. The Commission issued a Preliminary Report on April 20, 2004 for public comment. The 500-page Preliminary Report contained comprehensive background material for its 192 recommendations covering every facet of oceanography. The 45-day deadline for receiving public comment on the Preliminary Report launched a massive undertaking by individuals, trade organizations, nongovernmental organizations, federal agencies, consortia, and numerous other groups to provide reaction and response to the Commission. Over 800 responses were received from interested stakeholders, including comments from 37 governors and five tribal leaders. The commissioners incorporated those comments and on September 20, 2004, delivered its final report *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century* to the President and Congress, as directed in the enabling Act (report available on-line at <http://www.oceancommission.gov>). The Oceans Act further stipulates that “Within 90 days after receiving ... the report and recommendations of the Commission ... the President shall submit to Congress a statement of proposals to implement or respond to the Commission’s recommendations for a coordinated, comprehensive, and long-range national policy for the responsible use and stewardship of ocean and coastal resources for the benefit of the United States.” The President’s response is presently (at the time of this writing) being coordinated by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) with input from many federal agencies through an Interagency Ocean Policy Group. CEQ must deliver the President’s response to Congress by December 20, 2004. But then what?

The period of providing structured and organized responses will be over. But if the report is to do more than sit on the shelf, there must continue to be proactive and enthusiastic reactions. A major goal of TOS is to bring together interests of those representing all facets of oceanography. It follows then that it's in the best interests of TOS members to speak up and support those parts of the USCOP report that you are most comfortable with. To paraphrase Mel Briscoe and others in the commentary piece cited above: I urge members and readers to: (1) Tell your Congressional representatives what you agree with in the Report and what you want to see happen. Urge them to support legislation for those things you wish to see. Promote aspects of the report that you like, without trashing the things you don't like. (2) Involve students with the report. It contains a wealth of information and references on our oceans and coasts. Instructive links and connections among science, policy, and decision-making are pervasive throughout. (3) Do not shy away from research directions that may be risky or controversial, but that improve scientific knowledge. Policy-makers are going to make decisions, whether all the issues are understood or not; it is in our best interest that those decisions are based on knowledge and wisdom.

I eventually found the issue and article that I was searching for—in the special edition celebrating John Knauss (*Oceanography* 14:2, 11-16). But right after the paper chase was over, I recalled that many of *Oceanography's* back issues are posted on-line. Sure enough, after visiting the TOS web site, finding the article was easy (<http://tos.org/oceanography>). As resources become available, more papers published in *Oceanography* will be available on the TOS web page.

Two calls to action, and excellent sources of oceanographic history, science, and policy, are available in both paper and digital forms. *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century* has the potential to radically change and improve the coordination and conduct of oceanography in the United States. The second, *Oceanography* magazine, has the potential for enhancing communication about oceanography among its practitioners, students, and the public by making available outstanding papers, commentaries, and other features in its pages. Both are worthy of your continuing interest, participation, and support.



LARRY CLARK, TOS PRESIDENT