



# National Association of Marine Laboratories

September 8, 2005

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The Honorable Sherwood Boehlert  
Chairman, House Science Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
2320 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Boehlert:

On behalf of the National Association of Marine Laboratories (NAML), I am writing to urge the Committee's support for Titles I and II of S. 39, the *National Ocean Exploration Program Act* and the *NOAA Undersea Research Program Act of 2005*. This legislation was passed in the Senate by unanimous consent on July 1, 2005.

With 95 percent of the ocean floor still unexplored, and the importance of the oceans to human health, climate change, food security, energy resource management, and commerce, it is imperative that this country strengthens its investment in ocean exploration and undersea research. S. 39 addresses these concerns and is a positive step towards a better understanding of the world's oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes, which are vitally important in sustaining healthy and productive human life.

As a nonprofit organization of over 120 member institutions representing coastal, marine, and Great Lakes laboratories, stretching from Guam to Bermuda and Alaska to Puerto Rico, NAML recognizes and appreciates the value of thorough and comprehensive knowledge of the oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes. Through its unique national and regional networks and partnerships, NAML members have been actively involved in ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes scientific research, taking full advantage of the existing ocean exploration and undersea research programs. This broad-reaching network of marine laboratories also acts as an interface between the science of the oceans and the education and outreach activities that create social value from that science.

Title I of S. 39 authorizes a coordinated National Ocean Exploration Program within NOAA, which is consistent with the U.S. Commission of Ocean Policy recommendation that NOAA and NSF take the lead in developing an expanded national ocean exploration program. Primarily due to the "lack of a long-term, large-scale national commitment to ocean exploration," we have only a cursory understanding of our oceans. These vast, uncharted regions continue to yield countless

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*The National Association of Marine Laboratories (NAML) is a nonprofit organization of over 120 member institutions representing coastal, marine, and Great Lakes laboratories in every coastal state, stretching from Guam to Bermuda and Alaska to Puerto Rico. Members serve as unique "windows on the sea," providing information on the rich environmental mosaic of coastal habitats as well as offshore oceanic regions and the Great Lakes. NAML member laboratories conduct research and provide a variety of academic, education and public service programs to enable local and regional communities to better understand and manage the ocean, coastal and Great Lake environments. NAML is comprised of three regional associations: the Northeastern Association of Marine and Great Lakes Laboratories (NEAMGLL); the Southern Association of Marine Laboratories (SAML); and the Western Association of Marine Laboratories (WAML).*

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new discoveries each time they are explored. The impact of a sustained ocean exploration program could be immense, vastly expanding the world's wealth of knowledge which could lead to scientific breakthroughs such as new medical advances and possible new energy sources that may be found in the deep sea.

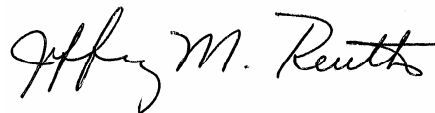
Title II of the bill authorizes the establishment of The NOAA Undersea Research Program (NURP) – a program that takes the next step beyond exploration to provide an ecosystem perspective and enhanced understanding of our nation's oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes. In so doing, NURP directly addresses the recommendations made by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy calling for an ecosystem-based approach to management. To address NOAA's priority of protecting, restoring, and managing coastal and ocean resources through this new approach, NURP provides data on commercially important fish, coral reefs and deep water corals, biodiversity, methane hydrates, biotechnology, coastal hazards and important underwater habitats and their associated organisms. For example, sponsored research on deep water corals has identified over 18 new species in the past two years and directly contributed to better management by conserving coral habitats from the impacts of fishing off Georges Bank and the coast of Florida. NURP is also a leader in underwater technology development – for example, NURP established *LEO-15*, the world's first seafloor observatory and operates the *Aquarius*, the world's only underwater laboratory. NURP also addresses the Commission's recommendations relating to education and outreach by providing "hands-on learning opportunities for teachers and students using underwater vehicles and data from seafloor observatories."

The bill authorizes the existing NURP program through fiscal year 2015 and maintains the current structure of the program comprised of six regional Centers and the National Institute for Undersea Science and Technology (NIUST). NURP provides support to NOAA and academic scientists through a rigorous peer review process, a fundamental precept strongly endorsed by NAML. Enacting this legislation would formally establish this program within NOAA and provide the much-needed consistent funding required for this program to meet its mission.

NAML would like to thank you and your Committee for the leadership and support you have consistently provided for ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes research in past efforts. We hope you and Committee will continue with these efforts by working towards the enactment of S. 39 – the *National Ocean Exploration Program Act* and the *NOAA Undersea Research Program Act of 2005*.

Thank you for the opportunity to convey these views.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey M. Reutter  
President

cc: Honorable Bart Gordon, Ranking Minority Member