National Association of Marine Laboratories

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October 18, 2007

The Honorable Alan Mollohan, Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Mollohan, Ranking Member Frelinghuysen, Chairwoman Mikulski, and Ranking Member Shelby:

On behalf of the National Association of Marine Laboratories (NAML) I am writing to urge you and your colleagues to give priority support to the important research and education programs within the FY 2008 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Appropriations bill - particularly the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The Ocean Research Priorities Plan crystallized NAML's support for these programs by stating: "Scientific discovery, driven by competitive, peer-reviewed investigations, is the foundation of the nation's research enterprise and is an intrinsic and highly valued component of the ocean research portfolio."

NAML a is a nonprofit organization of about 120 members employing more than 10,000 scientists, engineers, and professionals and representing ocean, coastal and Great Lakes laboratories nationwide. NAML labs support the conduct of high quality ocean, coastal and Great Lakes research and education in the natural and social sciences and the effective use of that science for decision-making on important issues facing our country. We are careful stewards of federally-funded research involving the oceans, coasts and Great Lakes and, thanks to our local connections, have the ability to bring the excitement of the oceans and Great Lakes to all Americans. However, this would not be possible without sustained and adequate federal support for the competitive extramural research and education programs at NSF, NOAA and NASA.

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).

National Science Foundation. NSF is a cornerstone to ocean, coastal and Great Lakes research and its funding has been critical to achieving many of the Nation's most important advances in science, education and technology. NAML is extremely encouraged that the House and Senate once again support substantial increases for NSF in FY 2008, consistent with President's American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI). NAML is supportive of the ACI and appreciates the need for the U.S. to enhance its ability to use new knowledge and technologies to be innovative and maintain our competitiveness in today's global marketplace. We applaud the House for the following report language and urge the conferees to reiterate this view in the final conference report:

> "…As the Innovation Agenda moves forward, it is important to note that maintaining U.S. competitiveness will depend on advances in, and the interactions among, all fields of science. The Committee expects NSF to ensure that the biological sciences, geosciences, and social, behavioral, and economic sciences directorates receive increases in fiscal year 2008 that are comparable to the other directorates."

NSF is of particular significance to NAML member laboratories because of the depth and breadth of its competitive, merit-based programs in environmental research and education, primarily in the geosciences and biological sciences directorates. NSF also provides vital support for the research and education infrastructure needs of the ocean, coastal and Great Lakes science community through a number of programs, including the NSF-wide major research instrumentation (MRI) program, the Ocean Observing Initiative (OOI), and the ongoing improvements in facilities, communications, and equipment through the Field Stations and Marine Laboratories (FSML) program. As NSF continues to enhance its research objectives and outcomes, infrastructure will remain a key component to its success. The FSML program in particular supports the critical infrastructure for facilities located in the natural habitats of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems that conduct research and education and foster an atmosphere of mutual scientific interest and collaboration. The FSML program has remained fairly level at $2.5 million for a number of years while the demand for these funds has continued to grow. The success rate for this program has been significantly below the foundation-wide average, even though the quality of the proposals received is high. Increasing the program to $5 million in FY 2008 with an overall goal of $10 million in the future would reenergize the community of labs and field stations and greatly assist them in meeting their infrastructure challenges. This small investment would reap exponential benefits for the research community.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. NAML greatly appreciates the efforts of both the House and Senate to strengthen the NOAA budget in areas related to our oceans, coastal areas, and the Great Lakes. As an inaugural member of the Friends of NOAA Coalition, NAML has been an active advocate for a robust NOAA budget. We hope that as you conference this portion of the bill you will come as close to the Senate recommendation of $4.2 billion for NOAA as possible. This is a small investment given that over half of Americans live near the coast and fully one-half of the nation's Gross Domestic Product is generated in coastal watershed counties. NOAA's broad research and management mission is aimed at understanding and predicting the complex earth-ocean system to sustain ocean, coastal and Great Lakes resources and provide accurate weather, climate and ecosystem forecasts. The safety and quality of life of the Nation is contingent upon a healthy NOAA.

Extramural research is critical to accomplishing NOAA's mission. NOAA operates a number of programs that directly enable marine laboratories to assist NOAA in this regard. I highlight only a few below:

The National Sea Grant College Program is NOAA's primary university-based program in support of coastal resource use and conservation. Sea Grant research, education and outreach programs promote better understanding, conservation and use of America's coastal resources. The Sea Grant program has suffered reductions in recent years such that the funding level for FY 2007 has dropped to its lowest level in a

decade. This has put a significant strain on its ability to address the needs of the citizens it serves. We hope the conferees will end the flat funding cycle and provide – at a minimum – $60 million, the level recommended by the Senate. This modest effort would have immense impacts for the beneficiaries and users of the Sea Grant program.

In addition to Sea Grant, the Ocean Exploration and National Undersea Research Programs engage extramural researchers to meet NOAA's research challenges. Together these programs enable fundamental ocean discoveries and enhanced understanding of our nation's oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes. To address NOAA's priority of protecting, restoring, and managing coastal and ocean resources, these programs provide the scientific support for ecosystem approaches to better manage commercially important fish, coral reefs and deep water corals, biodiversity, methane hydrates, biotechnology, coastal hazards and marine protected areas. We encourage the conferees to adopt the Senate's funding recommendations for these programs along with healthy support for the entire suite of extramural NOAA research and education programs for FY 2008.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration. NASA's support for earth and space sciences is vital in helping us better understand the planet on which we live. The NASA Earth Science Applications theme benchmarks practical uses of NASA-sponsored observations from Earth observation systems and predictions from Earth science models. NASA implements projects that carry forth this mission through partnerships with public, private, and academic organizations. These partnerships focus on innovative approaches for using Earth science information to provide decision support that can be adapted in applications worldwide.

NAML urges the conferees to continue actively encouraging NASA to engage in more meaningful partnerships with the academic research and education community through enhanced support for their various competitive grant programs that address critical research issues related to the earth sciences, space sciences, as well as ocean, coastal and Great Lakes issues. In addition, we hope that you and your colleagues will support a budget for NASA science that will keep pace with the Nation's research needs and allow for future growth in an effort to better understand the planet on which we live.

Our members recognize the tough budget choices you and the conference committee must confront and appreciate all the support the committee has provided our Nation's research and education enterprise over the years. We believe such support is an important investment in the future health and well being of the country and hope the conferees will continue to give these programs the level of priority they deserve.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like additional information on NAML or the topics discussed here.

Sincerely,

Anthony F. Michaels
President, National Association of Marine Laboratories
Director, Wrigley Institute for Environmental Studies
University of Southern California