

# CENTER FOR SEACHANGE: TURNING THE TIDE IN NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY

by  
**Lonnie Shekhtman**

Discussions of the best ways to deal with America's troubled oceans are gaining momentum these days; not only are hundreds of the brightest high school students around the country debating the need for a national ocean policy, but ocean-related topics were a major theme at this year's American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) meeting, held in Seattle on February 12-16. The Seattle meeting, which brought together thousands of scientists, policymakers, teachers, students, and families to discuss the latest sci-

entific research, was the first time members of both the independent Pew Oceans Commission and the presidentially appointed U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy appeared together to discuss their recommendations for restoring the health of our ailing oceans and coastlines. rather than piecemeal. Ecosystems are composed of all of the organisms living in a certain place and their interactions with each other and with their environment. Ecosystem-based management, a recommendation of both commissions, acknowledges the connections among things and evaluates how policy decisions and actions interact across species, habitats, land and sea, and from one type of human activity to another.

**"Our nation needs to ensure healthy, productive and resilient marine ecosystems for our benefit..."**

The good news for the Center for SeaChange—which is working to put the recommendations of both commissions into practice—is that the fundamental recommendations of both commissions are similar, providing a boost to SeaChange's effort to enact a national ocean policy. Clearly, it is always more effective to work for solutions based on agreements rather than differences

Lubchenco explained ecosystem-based management best to United Press International: "In the same way that a physician considers the whole person—including medical history and current medications—in prescribing a cure for a specific ailment, ocean managers must learn to think about the interconnectedness of an ecosystem." She added, "Just as the heart is connected to the lungs and brain, so too are different species connected within an ecosystem."

"Facts are facts, and we're operating off the same set," William Ruckelshaus, a member of the U.S. Commission and former head of the Environmental Protection Agency told the Seattle Times in describing the findings of both commissions.

Currently, there are about 100 separate federal agencies involved in oceans governance. Both commissions recommend unifying ocean and coastal resources management activities through the establishment of a national ocean council that would coordinate policy among this patchwork of agencies. The two commissions also recommend the establishment of regional councils to coordinate federal, state and local ocean management and improve the health of marine and coastal ecosystems.

Jane Lubchenco, Pew Oceans Commission member, advisor to the Center for SeaChange, and a marine biologist, said in a Seattle Post-Intelligencer article that the message from both commissions "is that we are faced with a serious situation, and we need to move on finding solutions."

A new feature of this year's AAAS conference was a town hall meeting, where citizens, scientists and policymakers met to discuss the best ways to restore the health of America's oceans. SeaChange supported this effort to educate the public about the state of our oceans and the role science plays in restoring them.

Leaders of both commissions at the AAAS discussed the need for managing oceans as ecosystems,

In preparation for the town hall meeting, AAAS commissioned a survey of 2400 adults on marine science issues. Results of the poll were both promising and puzzling. For example, while the poll showed that nearly 80 percent of adults said they feel man-made stresses are endangering coastal regions and oceans and may lead to long-term damage, only one-third believe their own actions have a large impact on oceans and coastal areas. Additionally, while more than half of the respondents support the use of public funds for new research and technologies to reduce pollution, only 47 percent were in favor of government regulation restricting use of the seashore and 46 percent supported local efforts to reduce business and economic development of coastal areas.

These findings may indicate that people are becoming more aware of the problems our oceans and coastlines face, but do not yet understand that those problems are directly connected to their actions. The Center for SeaChange knows that change and recovery will take time and much effort and has already begun mobilizing policymakers and opinion leaders—through education, outreach, and advocacy—to update ocean policy in Washington, D.C. and communities across the nation. The two commissions paved our way by fostering national dialogue, which was long overdue, about the damage human activities have caused to marine life and what should be done to fix it. SeaChange has made its mission, its obligation, even, to be the conduit for reform.

Our nation needs to ensure healthy, productive, and resilient marine ecosystems for our benefit, and for the benefit of our children and grandchildren. Science is giving us the knowledge and the tools we need to act. We just need to muster the political will to do it.

(Article by **Lonnie Shekhtman**, Center for SeaChange.)

*(Founded in 2003, the **Center for SeaChange** is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization working to reverse the decline in our oceans' health through the enactment of a national ocean policy. SeaChange promotes the recommendations of the Pew Oceans Commission and compatible recommendations of the U. S. Commission on Ocean Policy to restore biological diversity and achieve sustainable use of marine ecosystems. SeaChange mobilizes policymakers and opinion leaders -- through education, outreach, and advocacy - to take action to reform ocean policy in Washington, D.C. and communities across the nation. In charting a course for a new ocean ethic, SeaChange calls for a commitment by the American people and their government to preserve our oceans as a public trust for future generations. "*

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