

Ocean Policy Committee Meeting Summary

June 12, 2019

Background: Pursuant to President Trump’s Executive Order (EO) 13840, “Ocean Policy To Advance the Economic, Security, and Environmental Interests of the United States,” the Ocean Policy Committee (OPC) met on June 12, 2019. The OPC co-chairs, Council on Environmental Quality Chairman Mary B. Neumayr and Office of Science and Technology Policy Director Kelvin Droegemeier, facilitated the meeting which included presentations by a number of Federal agencies that serve as OPC members. A summary of actions taken at the meeting is provided below.

➤ **OPC Subcommittee Updates**

During the OPC’s August 1, 2018 inaugural meeting, the OPC established the Ocean Resource Management (ORM) and Ocean Science and Technology (OST) subcommittees. Following that meeting, the subcommittees created workplans to carry out OPC’s priorities as described in EO 13840, which the OPC subsequently approved. During the most recent meeting, the OPC received updates on the subcommittees’ progress.

ORM subcommittee: Pursuant to its workplan and in coordination with both Federal and non-federal stakeholders, including regional ocean partnerships, the ORM subcommittee identified regional data needs and explored opportunities to streamline the release of Federal data. Working with OPC member agencies, the ORM subcommittee is compiling data that would meet regional data needs and will develop a plan to publically release the data. The ORM subcommittee is working to compile the draft data report to provide to the OPC in July 2019.

OST subcommittee: Pursuant to its workplan, the OST subcommittee identified priority ocean science and technology research needs of the OPC member agencies. These needs fall under three main themes: Forecasting the Physical and Biological Coastal Environment, Exploring the Unknown Ocean, and Inspiring Next-Generation Ocean Technology. As part of the OST subcommittee’s work, agencies identified numerous projects, both proposed and ongoing, that will advance our nation’s ocean science and technology research. The OST subcommittee is working to compile the projects and will present recommendations to the OPC in July 2019.

➤ **National Oceanographic Partnership Program Summit**

During the OPC’s inaugural meeting, the OPC committed to coordinate and support Federal agency participation in the National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP) as described in Section 5(e) of EO 13840. As part of those efforts, NOPP is in the initial planning stages for a proposed Summit, and OPC member agencies are part of the planning team. During the meeting, the Department of Energy described an opportunity under the NOPP to develop new ocean observing technologies powered by renewable energy. The OPC co-chairs encouraged members to continue to engage in development of the proposed Summit.

➤ **One Federal Decision**

In 2017, President Trump signed Executive Order 13807, “Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure.” This EO seeks to reduce the unnecessary duplication and uncertainty in the Federal environmental review and authorization process. In 2018, pursuant to EO 13807, a number of OPC member agencies signed the “One Federal Decision (OFD) Memorandum of Understanding”, committing to establish and coordinate a timely process for environmental reviews of major infrastructure projects. EO 13807 also established a One Federal Decision (OFD) policy for Federal environmental reviews of major infrastructure projects. The OFD policy sets a goal of completing environmental reviews within an agency average of 2 years.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) discussed two offshore projects as case studies in implementing the OFD policy. BOEM detailed an agency’s roles and responsibilities when it serves as the lead agency under the OFD policy in the timely completion of environmental reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). BOEM discussed the importance of addressing potential conflicts early in the process, and described some of the challenges associated with offshore projects, as well as BOEM’s ongoing efforts to address potential conflicts in the use of ocean space.

➤ **Ocean Exploration**

With more than 13,000 miles of coastline and 3.4 million nautical square miles of ocean within our territorial jurisdiction, the United States’ Exclusive Economic Zone is one of the largest in the world. In 2009, Congress established an ocean exploration program within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to coordinate and facilitate Federal undersea research and exploration. NOAA provided an update to the OPC regarding their ocean exploration program and discussed opportunities to enhance its mission. The OPC charged NOAA to develop options to increase the effectiveness and maximize the value of Federal investment in ocean exploration. NOAA will report back to the OPC at a future meeting.

➤ **Marine Debris**

The Interagency Marine Debris Coordinating Committee (IMDCC) is a multi-agency body responsible for streamlining the Federal government’s efforts to address marine debris, and is co-chaired by two OPC members, NOAA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). NOAA and EPA jointly discussed their agencies’ activities and efforts regarding plastic debris and litter in the ocean, and discussed key findings in IMDCC’s most recent report to Congress that was issued in March 2019. Several OPC members described the importance of the issue, including international waste management practices, ongoing research and development activities, waste reduction, and management of persistent plastics. The OPC will continue discussing potential action items to complement current agency activities.

Next Steps: OPC staff will convene a meeting of OPC Deputies later this summer to review work products from the ORM and OST subcommittees. Following this review, the work products will be submitted to the full OPC for approval and implementation. The OPC anticipates convening its next meeting in December 2019.