

October 2009

Mr. Michael Weiss
Deputy Associate Director, Ocean and Coastal Policy
Council on Environmental Quality
722 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

RE: Need for Oceans Policy to Safely Balance Our Economic Needs & Environmental Concerns

Dear Mr. Weiss:

Commonwealth North is Alaska's leading public policy organization, founded by Alaska's first two governors – members of opposite parties. Our diverse membership draws from the ranks of leaders in many fields. We appreciate the fact that the President's Ocean Policy Task Force had an extensive visit to Alaska, and that the interim report has a focus on the Arctic. Further, because the oceans are so important to the economy, environment and well-being of Alaskans, and are commonly owned and managed by both the State and federal governments, we appreciate attempts to improve coordinated ocean management and to boost research off our shores. We hope also that the policy process will result in the federal government investing in appropriate Coast Guard facilities for the Arctic, including aids to navigation, search and rescue capability, and icebreakers.

That said, as an organization we want to make our view clear that the President's Ocean Policy Task Force not be used as a vehicle to postpone exploration and development of outer continental shelf oil and gas in Alaska's Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. We believe that exploration should go forward. It is important to know what resources are there. The trans-Alaska pipeline, a major asset to our nation's security, is running less than half-full. Pre-exploration activity for oil and gas development in these regions, conducted by the Minerals Management Service, by academic institutions or industry to meet MMS stipulations, supports the concept of having strong baseline science that was expressed here by members of the task force, including Ms. Sutley and Dr. Lubchenco, during their visit. Choices, made in a public process, of what lands MMS put out to lease also followed that approach.

You will find strong support from our group for an oceans governance policy that successfully recognizes the importance of striking a balance between the protection of our oceans and their economic uses, particularly where responsible energy production is concerned. Unfortunately, the Interim Report of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force (the report) recently released by the federal government fails to recognize the work being done, through the oil and gas



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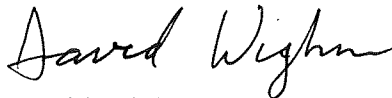
**Executive Director
Jim Egan**

leasing process, to strike a balance and to reach the Task Force goals. Further, there is great concern here that "ocean zoning" is just not thought out for our region. It must consider rapidly changing conditions, such as moving sea ice in the Arctic Ocean. How can we "zone" the ocean before we know what resources a particular area has?

We are further concerned that the Ocean Policy Task Force established by President Obama is proposing a system of oceans governance that could significantly impact our nation's ability to safely develop its own offshore energy, including oil, natural gas and renewable energy. We urge the federal government to take a more balanced, proactive approach to oceans governance, as recommended by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, which recognizes the significant energy resources and other economic uses contained in federal offshore waters. By ensuring that offshore areas surrounding the Gulf, Atlantic, Pacific and Alaskan coasts remain open to responsible oil, natural gas and alternative energy development, the federal government will provide the nation with the opportunity to safely produce our own energy, an effort that will significantly benefit our economy by creating domestic jobs and decreasing our dependence on foreign energy.

Commonwealth North is a strong proponent of the idea that a newly accessible Arctic Ocean requires coordinated efforts to provide safety, security, and reliability in activities that might be conducted there, including "industrial" activities of fishing, shipping, and energy development. We support improved science coordination, better funding of science programs, and more research into issues related to oil and ice. It would be wrong and unfair, however, to have this policy process be used to stop very good work being done that is vital to the economic and energy security of our nation. We hope that the Task Force final report is responsive to our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "David Wight".

David Wight
President

Cc: Governor Sean Parnell
Senator Lisa Murkowski
Senator Mark Begich
Congressman Don Young