



Oceans Conservation, Education, and National Strategy for the 21st Century Act Need, Purpose, Impact

Oceans in danger

Overfishing, habitat destruction, government mismanagement, coastal development, and agricultural runoff have ravaged once bountiful ocean ecosystems and created ocean "dead zones" where few life forms can thrive. After decades of human abuse, the world's oceans are now in a state of silent collapse, threatening our food supply, marine economies, recreational opportunities, and the natural resource legacy we leave our children.

Two landmark reports—by the independent Pew Oceans Commission and the congressionally established U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy—confirm the dire straits of ocean ecosystems and urge immediate action to tackle the crisis. Both commissions reported that failures in our current ocean management approach and structure are largely responsible for declining ocean health.

Disjointed government approach

Our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes are governed by over 20 Federal agencies administering over 140 Federal laws. In addition, the government implements countless other actions that affect ocean ecosystem function and productivity. As a result, the overall management of our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes is simply the haphazard sum of countless actions targeted to individual issues, regions, and species. We lack the common vision or responsible entity necessary to ensure that ocean and coastal ecosystems themselves – and their highly valued resources – are protected and restored.

OCEANS-21 provides an answer

HR-21, the Oceans Conservation, Education, and National Strategy for the 21st Century Act (OCEANS-21), provides a much needed solution. Specifically, OCEANS-21:

- Establishes a unifying vision for the protection, maintenance, and restoration of ocean health and a straightforward mechanism to achieve this vision across Federal agency actions
- Codifies and empowers the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as the lead Federal, civilian ocean agency with responsibility for our coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes. NOAA was established by presidential order in 1970 and has never had a legislatively defined mission or structure.

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- Establishes a National Oceans Advisor to the President and an interagency Committee on Ocean Policy to improve coordination and strengthen leadership around a common vision of ocean ecosystem health
- Establishes 9 Regional Ocean Partnerships around the country to ensure that local problems are properly addressed and to promote coordination among Federal, Indian, State, and local governments around the goals of ocean ecosystem health
- Established an “Ocean and Great Lakes Conservation Trust Fund” as a permanent funding source for State and Federal activities related to developing and implementing Regional Ocean Strategic Plans