

## A NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY NEEDED

Jerry Schubel

California and the nation need a strong national ocean policy to help conserve our most valuable and iconic resources. The ocean is at the heart of our culture and economy, and is a true symbol of the California dream.

Our ocean is a key component of the state's and the nation's economic engine. The ocean provides jobs, food, recreation and tourism opportunities that rely on healthy ocean ecosystems. Protecting ocean resources protects our economy.

According to the National Marine Fisheries Service, in 2008 California commercial fishermen caught nearly 324 million pounds of fish and shellfish worth more than \$120 million. And in 2004, the National Ocean Economics Program cited that California's ocean sector industries contributed more than \$41 billion to the state's gross domestic product.

Even more impressive, in 2007, more than 80 percent of California's economy, and 75 percent of its jobs were generated in its coastal counties. Nationally, coastal states accounted for more than 83 percent of the GDP in 2007. The coastal economy is the national economy, and the resources that support it must be managed well or both the environment and the economy will suffer.

The Southern California coastline, which extends from Point Conception to the U.S.-Mexican Border, is one of the most heavily urbanized areas of the world ocean, and contains the nation's two largest ports. It is an area of oil extraction and one that receives large amounts of partially treated municipal wastewater.

Every year we must strive to manage more users and increased demands. Recently, a rush to use the ocean to solve growing water, food and energy problems has produced hundreds of proposals for offshore use competing with current uses of shipping lanes, offshore oil platforms, fishing zones and marine-protected areas. The fragmented, functionally-based permitting system operating out of separate agencies is cumbersome and does not serve societal or environmental interests well. Currently, our ocean, coasts and Great Lakes are managed under 140 different laws implemented by 27 different federal agencies. No unifying vision or strategy has ever been implemented.

Under stress from pollution and trash, habitat loss, climate change, and industrial uses that continue to expand, our ocean is in desperate need of a unifying national ocean policy that will provide the coordinated vision and structure necessary to successfully manage the challenges our ocean is facing here, and nationwide.

The good news is that action - not just talk - is being taken to address these threats and management challenges nationally and in California.

In June 2009, President Obama issued a memorandum charging federal agencies to work together and with the public to draft recommendations on how best to create "a unifying framework under a clear national policy for the long term conservation of our (ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes) resources" within 90 days and a recommended framework for effective coastal and marine spatial planning within 180 days."

The Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force issued its interim report in September 2009 recommending a national policy for the stewardship of our ocean and the Great Lakes. It included strong interim recommendations built on the input from agencies and thousands of members of the public nationwide. The task force's final report should be transmitted to the president soon.

We urge President Obama to issue an executive order to enact the task force's recommendations. The executive order would provide policies to safeguard our ocean's special areas and wildlife, to nurture development of more resilient coastal communities in the face of a rising sea, and to enhance sustainable economic growth, including development of clean, renewable ocean energy.

It's time to finally address a fundamental gap in our nation's capacity to conserve our coastlines in a long-term, coordinated manner. Fortunately, the administration may soon present the country with a strategy that accomplishes just that.

*Jerry R. Schubel is president and CEO of the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach. He also serves on the Coastal America Executive Committee.*