



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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SENATORS CALL FOR OCEANS OVERSIGHT HEARINGS RFA Praises Legislators For Recent National Oceans Policy Request

The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) today praised a coalition of U.S. Senators for calling on oversight hearings in the Senate to examine the president's new National Oceans Policy. Enacted by executive order in the summer of 2010, the National Oceans Policy has been widely criticized for its over-burdensome bureaucracy which was passed without support of Congress.

On March 20, Senators David Vitter (R-LA), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Mike Lee (R-UT), John Barrasso (R-WY), Jim DeMint (R-SC), Jeff Sessions (R-AL), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Mike Crapo (R-ID), and John Cornyn (R-TX) sent a letter to the chairs of the Commerce, Science and Transportation committee, the Environment and Public Works Committee, and the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. "Given the many industries and issues captured by the plan and also under the jurisdiction of your committees, we would specifically like to explore under what Congressional authority the Administration has proposed this plan and, additionally, request oversight hearings on the nine national priorities listed by the plan," the letter states.

"While the policy purports to use existing authorities and funding for implementation, we are concerned the absence of Congressional oversight combined with the vastness of the proposal may lead to increased government spending and, ultimately, an expanded bureaucracy," the letter continues. Citing the regulatory uncertainty created by the draft plan as it relates to industries which depend on the ocean (including recreational and commercial fishing), the letter was addressed to Senate committee chairmen John Rockefeller (D-WV), Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) by adding "we believe rigorous Congressional oversight is necessary."

Last week, the RFA signed on to a group letter of 80 different organizations in support of efforts by Rep. Doc Hastings (R-WA) to call for a "pause in policy implementation" through funding appropriations towards President Obama's National Oceans Policy. Enacted by the president through executive privilege on July 19, 2010, the National Oceans Policy is eerily similar to a piece of legislation sponsored by Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA) which languished in Congress for nearly a decade due to overall lack of support by democrats and republicans in the House. After several failed attempts to get legislation (Oceans 21) passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee, a National Oceans Policy was instead enacted by President Obama through executive order 13547.

In a recent email blast to members, RFA executive director Jim Donofrio called the National Oceans Policy "a complete takeover of our state rights," which he said "should not be supported by either party."

RFA praised the latest effort by the nine signers of the Senate letter to Rockefeller, Boxer and Bingaman and encouraged the committee chairs to give ample consideration to the request. "Some groups are hailing this executive order as a way to curb sea sprawl and regulated ocean industry, but the political reality is that this effort never made it out of a congressional committee in the first place because it essentially awarded complete control of our nation's waters to the federal government and key political appointees in the process," he said.

"Some Beltway insiders are claiming to have the public's interest at heart by participating in this process but most grassroots activists see it as more Washington two-stepping and bureaucratic bungling at the sake of our coastal communities," Donofrio said, adding "this Presidential edict completely bypassed the legislative process and left all congressional debate and concerns at the wayside."

RFA has been bolstered by the fact that many U.S. legislators recognize what the political action fishing organizations has said all along, that well-funded environmental groups have been pushing an agenda-driven no-use policy masked as a multi-use spatial planning initiative.

“If you look at the catalyst for the entire initiative, it comes from the playbook of environmental groups that think the ocean ought to be controlled by the federal government,” said Rep. Bill Flores (R-TX). In a recent article by award-winning investigative journalist Audrey Hudson, Flores noted “This one to me could be the sleeping power grab that Americans will wake up to one day and wonder what the heck hit them.”

“This administration is more aggressive and left-leaning, and they are going whole hog,” added Sen. Vitter. “I think it’s clearly a threat, and in terms of negatively impacting jobs, it’s a very, very big threat.”

Two weeks ago, Rep. Hastings sent official correspondence from his House Natural Resources Committee to the House Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers (R-KY), as well as the Chairperson of each House Appropriations Subcommittee, asking that language be included in all Fiscal Year 2013 appropriations bills that would prohibit the use of funds to implement the new National Ocean Policy. The request was made as part of an effort to achieve a pause in policy implementation that would provide more time for oversight and examination of potential impacts

In supporting the letter, RFA cited Donofrio’s testimony before Rep. Hastings’ Committee in 2011 in which he said "It seems counterproductive to advance and fund the NOP when it will stifle job growth in the fishing sectors."

“The administration claims that this whole National Ocean Policy is nothing more than an attempt to coordinate federal agencies and make better permitting decisions,” said Rep. Don Young (R-AK) at a recent hearing. “Forgive me if I am a little suspicious when the federal government—through an executive order—decides to create a new bureaucracy that will ‘help’ us plan where activities can or cannot take place in our waters and inland.”

In the recent letter calling for additional congressional oversight in the Senate, the signors explain “in these tough economic times, it would be unfortunate if Congress chose to ignore responsibility for limiting bureaucratic hurdles to prosperity,” the lawmakers said in a March 20 letter.

RFA’s position is that any formal oceans policy which would lead to new regulations and additional bureaucratic governance must first come from both the House and the Senate, with debate and approval by all congressional committees, prior to becoming the law of the land.

“A lot of folks are calling us to ask what can be done to stop the National Oceans Policy, and outside of overwhelming Congressional support to slow the process through funding measures, the only political solution is to have our next president actually repeal executive order 13547,” Donofrio said.

View Senate letter at http://www.joinrfa.org/Press/NOP_oversight_FINAL.pdf

View House letter at http://www.joinrfa.org/Press/NOP_HouseResources.pdf

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA’s Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation’s saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.