

## **NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research**

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### **Roundtable: Extended Continental Shelf (ECS)**

On October 2, 2007, Dr. Richard Spinrad, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), Mr. Tim Petty, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, Department of the Interior (DOI), and Mr. Craig McLean, OAR Deputy Assistant Administrator for Programs and Administration, brought together a diverse group of high-level constituents to solicit input to ensure NOAA's, and its interagency partners', ECS mapping efforts reflect the needs of our partners and customers. Following is a summary of the major points discussed at the roundtable.

#### **Opening Remarks**

In his opening remarks, Dr. Spinrad welcomed the group and underscored the important role NOAA research plays in NOAA achieving its mission and goals. He explained the history of the interagency ECS activities, NOAA's commitment to working with our interagency partners, and NOAA's focus on advanced technology development to improve facilities, hardware and technical support. Dr. Spinrad then introduced Deputy Assistant Secretary Petty.

Mr. Petty echoed NOAA's commitment to interagency efforts and explained DOI's interest and role in ECS activities. He was also requested input on the types of data that the ECS interagency task force should collect.

Finally, Dr. Spinrad introduced Mr. McLean who briefly summarized the ECS interagency task force, the potential areas of opportunity for extending the U.S. continental shelf, the efforts to date, and the ECS claims process.

#### **Constituent Observations**

Participants identified current and future areas where NOAA and their interagency partners could focus ECS resources and efforts. Five common themes emerged: data collection, governance of the interagency process, partnerships, outreach and education, and the benefits of U.S. ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

#### **Data Collection**

Participants noted ECS exploration is a golden opportunity to collect not only bathymetric data, but also to assess potential resources such as fish habitat, and oil and gas reserves. They recommended exploring creative ways, such as partnerships, to leverage resources to collect not only bathymetric data but also resource data.

Overall, participants agreed it is imperative to collect a broad spectrum of data to make an ECS claim. This does not just include physical data, but also data that demonstrates the benefits of the ECS to any seafloor users. They recommended NOAA think big, not small.

Participants felt that the data collected (bathymetry, resource location, and other seabed information) will be useful to a variety of user groups and that there is much interest, across sectors, in obtaining this information.

Participants recommended NOAA and its interagency partners use model

simulations to make an economic and societal case that some small investment in ECS mapping will provide a large return on investment in the future.

### **Governance of the Interagency Process**

The participants were pleased with the interagency approach to ECS exploration, but acknowledged the interagency process itself may create challenges. Some suggested moving beyond simple coordination to the adoption of previously successful interagency governance models.

Participants also suggested that NOAA and its interagency partners examine their metrics for success and given the longer-term time frame for ECS mapping recommended consideration of a 7-10 year period for determining success. In addition, participants recommended the interagency ECS effort strengthen its budget submissions.

### **Partnerships**

Participants agreed partnerships are needed to maximize the benefits of the ECS data collection efforts, and that partners must be engaged early to ensure success. They also recommended using partnerships collect and combine all the data need to submit a successful an ECS claim. All seabed users should be considered for partnership.

The participants supported not only the federal interagency collaboration but also stressed the benefits of involving academic and industry partners. Participants noted the value of the ECS data collected by the government would be enhanced through partnerships with academia and industry. They noted the combined strength of academia's advantages in terms of single-area experts (e.g. the Arctic) and technology development, and industry's ability to transition research to operations and develop markets for new technologies and data.

Participants also suggested that the interagency task force should work with international partners such as Canada, Denmark, Norway, and Russia, since they share common borders.

In addition, participants believe opportunities remain for working within and among government agencies. Craig Mclean noted that the newly established NOAA Office of Exploration and Research, created from the merger of the Office of Ocean Exploration and the National Undersea Research Program, may conduct exploration in U.S. ECS areas.

### **Outreach & Education**

Participants felt that people involved in the science and technical process need to understand diplomatic efforts. Some participants recommended the interagency efforts develop a coordinated communications strategy targeting multiple user and interest groups.

## **Ratification of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Benefits of the ECS**

Participants recommended the U.S. ratify UNCLOS to benefit from the ECS.

Participants discussed the numerous benefits of extending the U.S. continental shelf such as improved security for seafloor cables, and potential oil, gas and seafloor mineral reserves. They also acknowledged there may be undiscovered uses for the U.S. ECS as well, including deep ocean water, carbon sequestration, and space for floating cities).

One participant reminded those present that ratification of UNCLOS would lead to the acknowledgement of the concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind.

**Conclusion** Mr. Petty and Mr. McLean thanked the participants for their valuable comments and suggestions to improve NOAA and interagency ECS data collection and coordination efforts.