

Senator Ron Wyden
Statement for NOAA Budget Hearing
May 1, 2002

Today's hearing will address the President's fiscal year 2003 budget proposal for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). I want to thank you, Vice Admiral Lautenbacher, for appearing before the Committee.

NOAA, a key component of the Department of Commerce, plays an important role in the everyday lives of our citizens through numerous contributions to the Nation's economic and environmental health. It is vital that we continue to fund the important programs that Congress has authorized, as well as to find new ways to support the Nation's economic and environmental needs.

This committee has consistently been supportive of NOAA's mission. But my colleagues and I have some additional concerns with the President's fiscal year 2003 budget proposal for NOAA.

As you know, in January 2000, the Secretary of Commerce declared the West Coast groundfish fishery a disaster. There is local support from fishers and environmentalists to get the right number of fishers out there, at the right time, catching the right number of fish to make this industry sustainable.

As I mentioned during your confirmation hearing last November, I introduced legislation to authorize a buyback program, which would decrease the number of fishers and boats in the West Coast groundfish fishery. But there is nothing in NOAA's budget to support a significant reduction of fishing capacity in the West Coast groundfish fishery. My first question will be: Why not?

Another concern is with the proliferation of lawsuits against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). What does this say about NMFS fisheries management, and how do they intend to handle these costs? In addition, how do these lawsuits affect how NMFS makes decisions. The recent NMFS whiting decision gives me cause for concern that NMFS is allowing the possibility of lawsuits against it to influence its decisions. This is not sound management.

Another concern is the dramatic proposal to terminate the National Sea Grant College Program within NOAA, which raises concern not only for Oregonians, but also for many other coastal states with Sea Grant programs.

Vice Admiral Lautenbacher, you are welcome here; and while it is a biological imperative to read your statement entirely, please be assured it will be placed in the record, and you may summarize if you'd like.