



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

SCHOOL OF MARINE AFFAIRS

April 16, 2009

Dr. Jane Lubchenco  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Room 5128  
14th St & Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Lubchenco,

With this letter, I would like to transmit for your consideration the final report of the Science Advisory Board Social Science Working Group "Integrating Social Science into NOAA Planning, Evaluation and Decision Making: A Review of Implementation to Date and Recommendations for Improving Effectiveness." I have not had an opportunity to brief you about NOAA's Science Advisory Board (SAB)\* and its activities. I look forward to having a chance to do so in the near future. In the meantime, please consider this report. It was prepared by the Social Science Working Group of the SAB and contains its findings and recommendations as approved by the SAB for transmittal to you.

NOAA asked the SAB to address four questions:

1. How can NOAA better identify and measure (qualify and quantify) its programmatic outcomes?
2. How can social science help NOAA and its partners effectively integrate natural science into decision making?
3. How can social science itself be integrated into decision making of NOAA and its partners?
4. How can social science capabilities at NOAA be strengthened where currently they are weak?

The report addresses these questions and makes a number of overarching findings and recommendations for implementing a much-needed and sustained social science research

and operations capability in NOAA. The utility of the social sciences is implicit in the NOAA mission statement and explicit in NOAA strategic plans.

The SAB finds, as did an earlier SAB review in 2003, that the capacity of NOAA to meet its mandates and mission is diminished by the underrepresentation and underutilization of social science. The social sciences continue to be underrepresented in NOAA research, operations, and decision making and in recent years social science capabilities have declined. Both funding and staffing of social science decreased between FY05 and FY08. With the exception of NMFS, social science activities within NOAA are *ad hoc*, uncoordinated, and are often incorporated as an afterthought.

The SSWG report to the SAB contains a number of recommendations to strengthen and better integrate social sciences at NOAA. Overall, improving the position of social science within NOAA will require advocates within NOAA leadership, the support of the Assistant Administrators (AAs), and a commitment to expand the science culture of NOAA.

To strengthen social sciences, the SAB recommends that a number of practical steps be taken in the near term: (1) conduct a social science needs assessment; (2) develop and implement a strategic plan to strengthen and integrate social sciences; (3) develop a system to identify and track social science FTE; and (4) ensure progress toward meeting social science capacity targets by instituting performance metrics based on increasing NOAA's value to society.

To improve the integration of social sciences, the SAB recommends that a suite of structural actions be taken: (1) create the Office of Societal Impacts external to line offices that reports directly to upper levels of NOAA leadership; (2) establish a standing Social Sciences Working Group of the SAB; (3) build social sciences into the Cooperative Institutes and Joint Institutes; and use special-purpose internal committees of NOAA social scientists only as a short term measure. The goal would be the eventual full integration of the sciences NOAA needs to achieve its missions.

NOAA faces rich opportunities for social science research investments in the thematic areas of climate, coasts and oceans, weather and water, ecosystems, and commerce and transportation. A number of options exist for staffing, funding, and performance measurement of social science. No single model will be optimal across all line offices and goal teams.

The SAB agrees with the central points made in the SSWG report and supports its recommendations. The social sciences are essential for quantifying and improving the monetary, human and scientific value of NOAA products and services.

On behalf of the NOAA SAB I assure you that we look forward to working with you and NOAA staff on implementing the important recommendations of the Report.

Sincerely,



David Fluharty, Ph.D.  
School of Marine Affairs  
University of Washington  
3707 Brooklyn Ave. NE  
Seattle, WA. 98105

206 685-2518  
[fluharty@u.washington.edu](mailto:fluharty@u.washington.edu)

CC: Mary Glackin  
Richard Spinrad  
Laura Furgione  
Paul Doremus  
Peter Wiley  
Susan Hanna  
Jim Sanchirico  
Cynthia Decker  
Jeremy Potter  
Donavan Wilson  
Mary Anne Whitcomb

\* NOAA's Science Advisory Board (SAB) was established by a Decision Memorandum dated September 25, 1997. It is the only Federal Advisory Committee with responsibility to advise the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere on long- and short-range strategies for research, education and the application of science to resource management and environmental assessment and prediction.

SAB activities and advice provide necessary input to ensure that National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) science programs are of the highest quality and provide optimal support to resource management, and environmental assessment and prediction. The SAB's 15 members reflect the full breadth of NOAA's responsibilities. Its members are appointed by the NOAA Administrator