

Capitol Hill Oceans Week Review

Eight graduate students (listed at end) from the Spring Semester 2013 Ocean Policy class (taught by Dr. Frank Muller-Karger and Dr. Mark Luther) recently returned from a very successful, productive, and fun trip to Capitol Hill Oceans Week (CHOW) in Washington, D.C.!

Firstly, we want to say a HUGE thank you to Dean Jackie Dixon at the College of Marine Science for generously funding this trip. Without her help, this trip would not have been possible.

The Issues

The issues we discussed during the week were largely focused around the [National Endowment for the Oceans Act](#) (recently passed in the Senate as an amendment to the [Water Resources Development Act](#)), which aims to promote protection and conservation of U.S. oceans, coasts and Great Lakes, the [Safety and Fraud Enforcement for Seafood Act](#), which will do a lot to combat seafood fraud, support American fisherman, and support the many jobs and monies that stem from productive American fisheries; and the challenges ahead for the [National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan](#). We also spoke some about restoration from the BP oil spill in the Gulf, and immigration reform, which affects a HUGE number of international students in higher education science programs across the country.

Meeting Highlights

Upon first arriving in D.C. we met with the communications staff at the American Geophysical Union (AGU), to get a briefing on how to have a successful meeting with Congressmen and their staff. Half of our group then met with Representative Ed Markey's office to discuss seafood fraud and voice our support for the [Safety and Fraud Enforcement for Seafood Act](#). [Rep. Markey](#) (D-MA) is the sponsor of the Act in the House, in addition to being an advocate for the environment and the ranking member of the House Natural Resources Committee. At the same time, the other half of our group met with Kaitlyn Kalua and her colleagues at the Ocean Conservancy. They told us about their organization's ocean priorities, including marine debris, ocean acidification, marine protected areas, coastal spatial planning and fisheries. Their government relations staff members spoke candidly with us about the political strategies and challenges behind each of these efforts.

On Day 2, all of us went to the opening CHOW keynote, given by Dr. Kathy Sullivan, the Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere (and a

former astronaut!) entitled *Healthy Oceans and Coasts for A Resilient America*. She stressed how to take action to make oceans and coasts more resilient in times of increasing vulnerability from storms and other disasters.

Most of the group then met with [Rep. Kathy Castor](#) (D-FL), who represents Tampa and St. Petersburg, and supports many issues that we care about here in the Gulf, including environmental cleanup, economic reparations, and scientific research following the BP oil spill. She is a big supporter of the College of Marine Science, and the USF-led consortia to study the impacts of the BP oil spill (for which she secured \$10M in 2010). She was very excited and supportive of our trip, and voiced her concern for the issues we talked about.

Several of us also met with Paul Cough, the Director of Oceans and Coastal Protection Division at the EPA, to discuss their role in the National Ocean Policy (NOP) Implementation Plan. Others met with Dave Wegner, a staff member for Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-CA), who is very knowledgeable about marine policy and Congressional science issues in general. He gave us some great insight into upcoming legislation, as well as advice about who to talk to regarding the issues we are concerned about.

To finish the day before heading to the NMSF awards dinner, we met with staffers from the offices of Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) that work on the Senate Oceans Caucus. We talked about all the topics that we were interested in.

On Day 3, we all headed to Silver Spring to meet with Glenn Boledovich (the NOAA Chief of Policy, Planning and Analysis), Senior Policy Advisor Jennifer Lukens from [NOAA's National Ocean Service](#), along with others from NMFS and Woods Hole. We discussed some general history of ocean policy in the U.S., how the NOP was drafted (a process that made me exhausted just hearing it), and the goals and challenges for the NOP implementation plan. It was especially great to get Jennifer's input since she served as NOAA's representative on the task force that formed the final recommendations for the NOP.

Later that morning, half of our group spoke with Sen. Bill Nelson's (D-FL) office to thank him for his support of marine research and Gulf restoration. We also talked about the National Endowment for the Oceans Act, which he co-sponsored, and voiced our concern about the Higher Quality Research Act and Congressional oversight of scientific research in general.

Next we all went to the [Consortium for Ocean Leadership](#) where we met with Kevin Wheeler, the VP and Director of Public Affairs, and discussed the opportunities for young scientists to enter into the policy realm and what it's like to advocate for ocean policy in DC. Some of us then headed to Don Young's (R-AK) office to discuss our issues. This meeting was very successful - we felt like we really informed the staffer on our issues. Rep. Young has not been very supportive of environmental issues in the past, but Alaska is facing potentially devastating issues with ocean acidification and fisheries, among others, and the staff member we met with was very interested in learning about legislation that could benefit their interests.

On Day 4 we had just one last meeting with (Brendan Kelly and Jonathan Andrechik) from the [Office of Science Technology Policy](#), the executive office that advises the President on science. We had a great discussion with them about the NOP and implementation, how scientists can get experience with policy, and the potential for scientists to enter into politics. The best part: the office was right across the street from the White House!

What Did We Learn?

There are a lot of people in DC that are fighting and advocating for healthy oceans and coasts, and supporting the science that we need! Large pieces of legislation, like the NOP, take a lot of collaboration, in addition to a lot of hard work. It seems to me that there is a need for more scientists in Washington that can communicate science, and its importance, to policy makers and the public at large.

And while the National Ocean Policy takes a step in the right direction, it is an executive order and there are no monetary appropriations for it right now. There are going to be a lot of challenges for the NOP implementation, both short and long term, because many in DC are opposed to the NOP by virtue of the fact that it was an executive order.

The Endowment Act has passed through the Senate on the WRDA, but it's now up to the House to pass it along to the next phase. Many said that it's unlikely that it will happen this year, and we may need to wait until next year to see progress on passing the Endowment.

Other Trip Highlights

On Day 2 we all went to the [National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation Leadership Awards Dinner](#), where Dr. Jane Lubchenco received the Lifetime Achievement Award and [Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse](#) (D-RI) received the Leadership Award for his work in advocating for ocean protection, stronger environmental protections, and combating climate change. Both gave great talks about the importance of protecting our oceans and coasts. This was a black-tie optional event, and we all looked very spiffy!

On Day 3 we went to the NOAA fish fry at the Dept. of Commerce building, where we ate a variety of *sustainable* seafood delicacies from around the country. Chefs were flown in to D.C. for the event.

Tips for future CHOW attendees

1. Come prepared
 - a. Do your homework on the issues you want to discuss - Does legislation exist on it? Where does it stand? Who are the sponsors/supporters/opposition? What would you recommend?
 - b. Make a pamphlet or flyer as a 'leave-behind' with pertinent information about your issue and why it's important. Make sure you make it relevant to your audience. And make sure to include your contact information.
 - c. Bring business cards to leave behind and let them know you can be used as a resource for the future on this or similar issues.
 - d. AGU has a communications department that does training on how scientists can successfully communicate with politicians. Set up a meeting with them first thing to get a quick briefing. This was our first meeting and was incredibly helpful!
2. Setup meetings with both proponents (for advice and to voice your support) and opponents (to try to inform and persuade them). Only meeting with people who agree with you doesn't accomplish much!
 - a. Determine what those opponents care about, what their constituents care about, and find middle ground from which to convince them to support your stance on an issue.

3. In each meeting, have each group member briefly introduce themselves, explain why you are meeting (e.g., what issues you want to discuss), and what you want (e.g. vote 'yes' on this bill, sponsor this bill, amend this legislation).
4. Dress the part
 - a. Washington is a very formal place. Make sure you have proper attire for meetings. They will take you more seriously if you look polished. Also, comfortable shoes.
5. Plan the timing
 - a. You might have several meetings in one day. Make sure you know their location, how long it will take to get there from your starting spot and what method of transportation to take. Several smart phone apps for navigating the metro system were very helpful for us.
6. Be engaging
 - a. Plan for everyone to have a question or two.
7. Follow up!
 - a. Short term: send an email to whomever you met with, thanking them for the meeting and reminding them to use you as a resource.
 - b. Long term: Send an email once a month, or more if there is a relevant bill or issue in Congress, to check in.
8. Remember: CONGRESS WORKS FOR YOU AND YOU PROBABLY KNOW MORE THAN THEM ABOUT SCIENCE AND YOUR ISSUE SO DON'T BE SHY

USF Graduate Student Attendees:

Emily Chancellor
Marcy Cockrell
Sarah Grasty
Elizabeth Herdter
Kaitlyn Lizza
Jason Baybutt
Michael Drexler
Matt McCarthy