



NERRA Policy Position

2/26/2006

LC-3. Integrated Ocean Observing System Policy

3.1 Preamble

A sustained, national Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) will have tremendous benefits—including mitigating coastal hazards, enhancing national security, improving ocean health, providing for the sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources, and educating the public about the role and importance of estuaries, coasts, and oceans in our daily lives. Information generated by the IOOS is vital to our nation, and remains essential as we develop effective ways to protect, restore, and sustain ocean and coastal ecosystems. A national IOOS will improve our ability to convey data streams and environmental information to fishermen, beachgoers, school children, coastal resource managers, public health officials, and others.

3.2 The Role of the NERRS in the Integrated Ocean Observing System

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS)—a network of protected areas established for long-term research, education, and stewardship—conducts a System-wide Monitoring Program. Established in 1995, the System-wide Monitoring Program measures short-term variability and long-term changes in coastal ecosystems, including locations that span the range of coastal environments from estuaries and coastal waters to watersheds. This program provides valuable real-time and long-term data on water quality and weather at frequent time intervals. Coastal managers use this monitoring data to make informed decisions on local and regional issues, such as assessing environmental impacts of contaminant spills, agricultural runoff, and nonpoint source pollution, and guiding estuarine habitat restoration. The water quality and meteorological monitoring components of the System-wide Monitoring Program have been recognized by NOAA as a fundamental backbone element in the IOOS framework.

As an established network of protected areas that support programs in estuarine monitoring, data management, and coastal education, the NERRS plays an integral role in the implementation of the IOOS.

3.3 Establishment of the Integrated Ocean Observing System

The IOOS will integrate existing local, state, regional, and national capabilities into a coordinated national and international network of observations, data management and communications, and data analyses and modeling that acquires and disseminates data and

information on the oceans and coasts. A well-integrated and coordinated IOOS will reduce and in some cases eliminate redundancy and information gaps in existing and future coastal and ocean monitoring programs.

3.3.1 Regional Framework. As the IOOS is developed, it should support implementation of regional associations in order to provide the framework for local collaboration. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy recommended strengthening regional approaches to allow decision-makers to manage on an ecosystem-based scale. The regional associations will be responsible for the design and operation of regional observing systems and for integration within the IOOS. Regional associations should manage the regional ocean and coastal observing and information programs that collect, measure, and disseminate data and information products to meet regional needs.

3.3.2 Partnerships. Diverse partnerships are required to implement the IOOS and to develop useful products for a broad audience. NERRA believes cooperative partnerships must become the catalytic core upon which a larger observation system, with broader participation from government and private sector groups can be built. Federal partners should consider research and monitoring relevant to local and regional needs and fully engage the non-federal partners in implementing IOOS at the regional and local levels.

3.3.3 Data Products to Support Coastal Management. Data sets generated by the IOOS should be useful and effectively translated to guide the management of our coasts and oceans and inform environmental decision-making. For an observing system to be useful to coastal decision-makers, this audience should be engaged in technology development and implementation to ensure IOOS information and products address critical coastal issues. The IOOS must link the nearshore and offshore processes and include data collection and products for the coastal and estuarine areas.

3.3.4 Education and Outreach. The IOOS presents an opportunity to inspire, captivate, and motivate school children as well as the public about the nation's coasts and oceans. NERRA believes that there is a great potential to educate our nation about the role and importance of estuaries, coasts, and oceans in our daily lives through ocean observations. In order for the IOOS to be successful, a thoughtful education program must be developed and reach several audiences including K–12 formal education, professional adult training, and informal general education.

3.4 Provide for Adequate Federal Funding

Because coastal and ocean ecosystem health is critical to our nation, it is imperative that we, as a nation, make a significant investment in the establishment of the IOOS. NERRA urges Congress and the Administration to provide adequate and stable funding for the IOOS. NERRA believes that a stable mechanism should be established to sustain the required level of funding. A sustained system will allow the tracking of change over time and provide information to evaluate management actions.

*Time limited (effective March Meeting 2006-March Meeting 2007).
Adopted March Meeting 2006.*