



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
The Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere  
Washington, D.C. 20230

MAR 24 2017]

VADM Paul G. Gaffney II, USN (ret.)  
Chair, Ocean Exploration Advisory Board  
1112 Gist Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear VADM Gaffney:

Thank you for your letter transmitting recommendations and advice from the Ocean Exploration Advisory Board (OEAB) regarding sea-going needs for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office of Ocean Exploration and Research (OER) and NOAA's general ocean exploration needs. I value the OEAB's advice and appreciate the OEAB's recommendations on this important topic.

I know you and the OEAB are well aware of the challenges NOAA faces in recapitalizing the fleet while ensuring we maintain and operate our existing platforms efficiently. The Administration's budget priorities and policies will have important implications for how NOAA moves forward toward the 21<sup>st</sup> century fleet the NOAA Fleet Plan envisions. But the OEAB's suggestion that NOAA consider more flexible platforms and consider tapping excess capacity available through the oil and gas industry is interesting as a possible way to meet some of NOAA's ocean exploration requirements and complements the approach described in the NOAA Fleet Plan.

I would like to invite you and the new OEAB Chair to meet with me and our Assistant Administrator for Research at your convenience for a discussion of the Board's recommendations, and to discuss the additional ways the OEAB can help NOAA through the expert advice provided. I have asked my staff to make the appropriate arrangements.

I look forward to meeting with you and John Kreider.

Sincerely,

Benjamin P. Friedman  
Deputy Under Secretary for Operations  
Performing the duties of the Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere  
and NOAA Administrator

