

**Ocean Exploration Advisory Board**  
*A Federal Advisory Committee Act Board*  
October 13, 2020

Dr. Neil Jacobs

Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Acting) and Assistant  
Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation and Prediction

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

14<sup>th</sup> and Constitution, NW

Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Jacobs:

During its meeting on October 1-2, 2020, the Ocean Exploration Advisory Board (OEAB) received briefings on national ocean exploration program developments, the Workshop to Identify National Ocean Exploration Priorities in the Pacific (co-convened by NOAA and the Consortium for Ocean Leadership), the interim report of the OEAB's Blue Economy Subcommittee, and ongoing work of the NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research (OER). We were told that the OER Program Review report will soon be released. Significantly, the OEAB welcomed five new members.

The difficult times our nation faces have had a serious impact on NOAA's ocean exploration activities. Nevertheless, NOAA, working with partners in the federal government and in the private, philanthropic and academic sectors, has worked to meet national needs for high-quality scientific information about the deep ocean and to share those results with those who need or want them. We applaud the work of NOAA and its partners.

We identified areas of opportunity in which to accelerate our understanding of the deep ocean and to develop the U.S. Blue Economy. Progress in these areas would help advance the five goals of the new National Strategy for Mapping, Exploring, and Characterizing the United States Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

***Blue Economy***

The OEAB received a briefing on the interim report of the Blue Economy Subcommittee from its chair and information from RDML Gallaudet on the new NOAA Blue Economy Executive Committee. We appreciate the work of the subcommittee and within NOAA to implement subcommittee interim recommendations. Given the importance of the Blue Economy and the ongoing work of the NOAA Blue Economy Executive Committee, we recommend that the term of the Blue Economy Subcommittee be extended at least through December 31, 2021.

### ***Partnerships***

Ocean exploration is an inherently partnership-driven enterprise, because ocean expeditions today involve work across disciplines and sectors. We see benefit in thinking and rethinking how partnerships—whether with foundations, the private sector, or academic institutions—can support national ocean exploration priorities. Members discussed the need for systems and processes to engage with non-government entities, including the possibility of dedicated staff to best identify opportunities, develop relationships, and manage partnerships. For example, should OER designate specific points of contact for organizations that might want to partner with OER and NOAA in ocean exploration and for managing individual partnerships? OER and NOAA should review its recent experience and consider if growing partnership opportunities requires internal changes and investments.

### ***Access to Data***

The purpose of ocean exploration expeditions is to gain new knowledge as documented through the acquisition of high-quality data. New data, and data from past expeditions, ought to be readily available and discoverable in repositories that are easy to use to create knowledge. Moreover, ready access to information derived from those data is also an important aspect to engage stakeholders and the public, as addressed below. We urge NOAA to promote common standards and interoperability for data relevant to ocean exploration, seafloor mapping and characterization and to lead in national efforts to improve management of and access to ocean data.

### ***Innovation***

Today's pace of tremendous technological advances provide NOAA with great opportunity to conduct ocean exploration in more efficient, more sustainable and more cost-effective ways, anticipating a future paradigm in which ocean exploration is less dependent on the current paradigm of large ships and vehicles that require massive capital and maintenance investments. NOAA could help accelerate development, adoption and deployment of new instruments and vehicles that will help to pioneer a new approach to exploring and characterizing the deep waters of the U.S. EEZ and beyond.

### ***Engaging Stakeholders and the Public***

Ocean exploration is a charismatic activity of interest to the public. Ocean exploration discoveries, properly shared, help the public understand the importance of the ocean and its system in both human and natural terms. Ocean exploration provides rich content for students and professional and home educators as they investigate science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) fields. Because OER and its exploration partners plan to shift focus to the Pacific for 2022, there is a need now, before specific expedition objectives are set, to engage Indigenous communities in the Pacific Islands to build relationships, understand existing knowledge—including traditional knowledge—and understand the priorities of the people who live there.

### ***International Ocean Exploration Partnerships and Campaigns***

U.S. expertise and capabilities are not sufficient to understand the global ocean. The OEAB sees that, through NOAA, international partnerships will allow the U.S. to leverage investments and capabilities that exist in other nations and to accelerate a common understanding of the deep ocean. Such partnerships can also further U.S. national security interests. Given its timeliness in the context of NOAA's focus on the Blue Economy, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) represents one particularly exciting strategic opportunity. The OEAB urges OER and NOAA to consider how the UN Decade could be used to develop new international partnerships--perhaps through a region-wide focus on the Pacific that could readily align with, leverage, and add significant value to NOAA's forthcoming Pacific Ocean campaign.

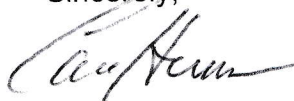
### ***Ocean Exploration Campaigns***

OER has already achieved notable past successes with its established campaign approach to ocean exploration, which provides a framework for collaboration with internal and external partners. The OEAB expects that the report from the recent NOAA-Consortium for Ocean Leadership Workshop to Identify National Ocean Exploration Priorities in the Pacific will provide useful guidance for further successful campaigns.

The OEAB is planning to meet next in early December 2020. We would like to request a briefing at that time from OER about how it might respond to the recommendations and advice presented in this letter.

Welcoming the new OEAB members offered an opportunity to reflect on the OEAB's activities since it was established and to express appreciation for the hard work and wise leadership you and RDML Gallaudet have invested in ocean exploration. We are grateful for your continuing support and leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cameron Hume', written in a cursive style.

Cameron Hume  
Interim Chair