

Ocean Exploration Advisory Board
A Federal Advisory Committee Act Board

July 15, 2021

Dr. Richard W. Spinrad
Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
and NOAA Administrator
14th and Constitution NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Spinrad:

During its meeting on June 30, the Ocean Exploration Advisory Board (OEAB) first looked back at how circumstances for its work have changed since it was established in 2014. The board then looked forward to identify how in the next few years NOAA can best meet evolving needs for maximizing ocean exploration results. In particular, we discussed the implications of technological advances, new ways to engage the public, and the opportunity NOAA has to lead in building partnerships and alliances to expand our understanding of the oceans.

The board has supported an expansive view of NOAA's role in ocean exploration. We have called for and supported the national strategy to map, explore, and characterize the nation's Exclusive Economic Zone; we urged NOAA to procure access to an ocean exploration ship to replace NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer*; and we have urged active national participation in the U.N. Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. We took the initiative to conduct a special review of NOAA's role in ocean science for public education. An OEAB subcommittee examined how NOAA's exploration activities should promote the Blue Economy. The board believes that ocean exploration must address challenges related to climate change, food security, and renewable energy.

The board is convinced that to provide national leadership for ocean exploration, NOAA must do more than cooperate with other federal agencies in coordinating activities and messaging. The challenges ahead require a framework for alliances among government, philanthropic, academic, and private sector organizations to pursue national, and at times international, objectives for ocean exploration. We commend NOAA for the steps it has taken to begin playing this necessary role by forming specific partnerships based on existing frameworks and encourage it to develop new models for public-private partnerships to maximize the potential value of these partnerships.

The board discussed how NOAA, in its planning for a new Pacific campaign for ocean exploration, has an opportunity to maximize the benefit it can bring to the nation, drawing upon recommendations from the September 2020 National Ocean Exploration Priorities in the Pacific Workshop Report. NOAA's 2015-2017 Pacific campaign made important discoveries, met government requirements, and engaged the public across the Pacific basin.

In planning for its new campaign, NOAA should 1) invite other ocean exploration organizations — at both the national and international scale — to form an alliance to pursue common priorities and to promote the priorities of the U.N. Ocean Decade and Seabed 2030; 2) address regional priorities (and consider Pacific Island nation interests) for ocean exploration; 3) test new technologies for mapping, exploring, and characterizing the deep ocean; 4) evaluate a broad approach that integrates data from the seafloor, water column, and other observing networks to create the most complete understanding possible of the area being explored; 5) build relationships with Indigenous communities to integrate traditional knowledge and wisdom with exploration expeditions; 6) engage educators and the public, with a particular focus on Indigenous communities, throughout the Pacific region; and 7) build capacity in the region by engaging regional organizations, through participation in expeditions, and through sharing of data and results.

The board welcomes the opportunities ahead and is eager to be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cameron R. Hume". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Cameron R. Hume
Chair, Ocean Exploration Advisory Board