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### U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System Advisory Committee

March 25, 2024

Dr. Richard W. Spinrad  
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and  
Atmosphere & NOAA Administrator  
Herbert C. Hoover Building, Room 6811  
14<sup>th</sup> Street & Constitution Ave. N  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Spinrad,

*Rick*

We are writing in response to the NOAA Congressional Justification of the Fiscal Year 2025 President's Budget. Through many roles across the private, academic, and federal sector, we have been a long-time proponent of the Integrated Ocean Observing System<sup>®</sup> (IOOS) and the data and services provided by the Regional Associations of IOOS. This national network has been developed over the last two decades. We are concerned by the \$10 million proposed as the fiscal year 2025 budget for IOOS Regional Observations (NOS-31 through NOS-34) representing a reduction of more than 76% from fiscal years 2023 and 2024 enacted levels, and less than any funding level for the program since its inception in the 2008 federal budget. Funding at this level would fundamentally cripple the network of the IOOS federal observing system.

The NOAA announcement of its Fiscal Year 2025 budget promotes investment in observational infrastructure, climate resilience, and expanded data and services. IOOS is a program that delivers on all those criteria, providing near real-time, actionable data and information to users who live and work along our nation's coasts and Great Lakes. The 11 federally-certified Regional Associations provide actionable, near real time data, as well as tools and forecasts, that are tailored to the needs of local and regional users while also supporting and enhancing national models, forecasts, and information products. IOOS supports safe and efficient maritime transportation and commerce, U.S. Coast Guard search and rescue operations, offshore energy development and operations, resource management and protection, environmental prediction (e.g., marine heat waves, harmful algal blooms, ocean acidification), improved understanding and notification of hazards (e.g., hurricanes and flooding), and more.

NOAA has called the investment in IOOS through BIL and IRA "historic." The work the IOOS Regional Associations will support with those funds is aligned with the intent of those laws. BIL funding is enabling recapitalization and upgrading of aging infrastructure. IOOS does not receive PAC funding, so there is no dedicated source to address infrastructure recapitalization. The IRA funding would expand and enhance service delivery with special attention to services to overburdened frontline communities, including Tribes and Indigenous communities. It scales capabilities for hyper-local community data and tools that have been developed and piloted in a few regions and expands the types of data that can be collected with existing platforms,

including data needed to improve federal models and tools. These activities are not just core operations nor business as usual. The proposed core funding for fiscal year 2025 negates this historic investment. It is a wasted opportunity to rely on those funds to backfill support for core operations.

A NOAA budget that deprioritizes extramural partnerships during times of fiscal austerity ignores constituent priorities, which are best addressed by strong regional programs that regularly engage with local decision makers to understand and deliver information that meets their needs. The impact of the funding reduction proposed in the Fiscal Year 2025 President's Budget will be the loss of the long-term data and real-time services that the IOOS Regional Associations provide, adversely affecting numerous businesses, communities, and individuals nationwide who rely on these services. Over the long term many of the partners within the IOOS backbone observing elements will be forced to depart the network out of necessity and will not be recovered even if this is short term budget decline.

As you well know, it was over twenty years ago that the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, chaired by Admiral James D. Watkins, USN (ret), called for the establishment of a U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System. The report stated, "the United States simply cannot provide the economic, environmental, and security benefits..., achieve new levels of understanding and predictive capability, or generate the information needed by a wide range of users, without implementing the IOOS." Many Regional Associations saw their beginnings in those early years, followed by the strong bipartisan support for and establishment of IOOS in law five years later. NOAA, as the steward of U.S. IOOS, has supported through successive administrations the growth and development of the original IOOS vision of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the broader ocean science community.

We strongly urge you to amend the President's Budget request as it relates to IOOS Regional Observations. Funding to the system should be at the bipartisan authorized appropriation level of \$56 million to keep pace with inflation and ensure there are no disruptions to the services that users rely on. At a minimum, the IOOS Regional Observations must be funded at the Fiscal Year 2024 enacted level of \$42.5 million.

Thank you,



Scott C. Rayder  
Chair, U.S. IOOS Advisory Committee