April 21, 2003

The Honorable Donald L. Evans
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
Office of the Secretary, Room 5516
14th & Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the Sea Grant Association (SGA), I wish to thank the Department for its continued support of the NOAA National Sea Grant College Program and, in particular, Sea Grant’s inclusion in the President’s FY04 budget request. The purpose of this letter is to request your support in securing increased funding for the NOAA Sea Grant program in FY05 and beyond, and to offer SGA’s assistance to that end.

As you know, in 2002, Congress and the President approved a substantially higher authorization of the NOAA Sea Grant program with passage of PL107-299. In addition, earlier this month, 131 members of the House of Representatives and 28 members of the Senate signed delegation letters to their respective appropriations committee leaders in support of enhanced Sea Grant funding. These successes illustrate true broad-based support for NOAA Sea Grant and are the result of all members of the Sea Grant community working together.

For over 35 years, NOAA Sea Grant has proven its value as a program that supports rigorous, competitive, and high quality research and objective outreach and education that is directly responsive to the concerns and needs of coastal stakeholders. Over 300 Sea Grant institutions across 31 programs collaborate to respond to issues of national and regional importance using partnerships which bring together federal, state, and private sectors for an extraordinary return on a modest federal investment.

However, over the last two decades, NOAA Sea Grant has lost many opportunities to address critical coastal, marine, and Great Lakes issues simply because its base funding has not kept pace with inflation and demand. Indeed, Sea Grant’s “buying power” has actually decreased by more than 20% during that time. We know that DOC and NOAA well-recognize that increased funding for Sea Grant is necessary to offset this deficit and enhance our ability to address NOAA’s mission. In that regard, the SGA offers its expertise, time, and assistance in the pursuit of this shared objective.
For FY04, the SGA has asked Congress to appropriate $68.41 million for Sea Grant funding, reflecting an $8 million increase over FY03 levels. Of the $8 million increase, we have requested that $5 million be added to help restore Sea Grant’s “buying power,” and that $3 million be added to support the Sea Grant fisheries extension program that will enable us to permanently place additional fisheries field agents “on the docks” to address critical economic and resource issues facing the nation’s commercial and recreational fishing industries.

With its new authorized funding levels, NOAA Sea Grant is facing a $15 million gap between authorized funding and appropriated levels. FY04 represents the first year of SGA’s three-year plan to secure $5 million each year to close this gap and restore Sea Grant’s buying power. Consequently, SGA will be requesting base funding levels of $70.41 million for FY05 and $75.41 million for FY06. The SGA respectfully requests your support for and active participation in this proposed funding plan for the NOAA Sea Grant program.

The SGA appreciates that all participants in the Sea Grant network need to be fully engaged in the budget process to reach our mutual goal of enhancing stakeholder service through increased funding. As part of this effort, the SGA, on behalf of the Sea Grant community, desires to become integrally engaged as a contributing partner in the planning process for the NOAA budget beginning with the FY05 budget process, specifically in the design and implementation of “matrixed” programs. Sea Grant represents a critically important resource for the development and implementation of NOAA’s research and outreach agenda; and SGA wishes to garner support from DOC, NOAA Research and NOAA’s Program Planning Office for greater use of Sea Grant expertise by other offices within NOAA.

As you balance the priorities within the DOC, please keep in mind that NOAA Sea Grant program efforts are truly representative of the goals of this Administration. Specifically, Sea Grant is a unique partnership between federal, academic, state and private sector interests that fosters economically viable and safe coastal communities. Linking university expertise with the private sector to support and foster small business innovation is a hallmark of Sea Grant. The program also vests the nation’s universities, stakeholders, and communities as one-third of Sea Grant’s support comes from non-Federal sources as matching funds. In addition, Sea Grant is a State funding priority; even with significant State budget cuts, States are still providing matching funds for Sea Grant programs. Additional investment in Sea Grant is an efficient and effective way for the DOC and NOAA to better address their multiple missions.

Thank you again for your continuing support. We remain committed to furthering NOAA’s mission and to working together to secure increased funding for the important work conducted by NOAA Sea Grant.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Stickney  
President

cc: Samuel Bodman, Deputy Secretary, USDOC  
Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, NOAA Administrator  
Louisa Koch, Acting AA, OAR  
Ronald Baird, Director, NSGCP  
Peter Bell, Chair, Sea Grant Review Panel