



GULF OF MEXICO COASTAL OCEAN OBSERVING SYSTEM

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MEMORANDUM

TO: NFRA Board of Directors

FROM: Board of Directors, GCOOS RA

SUBJECT: An open letter to our National Federation of Regional Association Colleagues from the Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System Regional Association

The GCOOS-RA Board of Directors recommends that in concert with our colleagues who comprise the National Federation of Regional Associations, we consider the adoption of a more proactive role for NFRA as the national advocate for our regional associations and the National Integrated Ocean Observing System. Energizing NFRA as an even stronger advocate for IOOS and the regional association's essential role in IOOS is consistent with the NFRA functions articulated in June 2004 and the "NFRA Terms of Reference" from February 2005. As we all are largely volunteer-based organizations, we understand how difficult it is to accomplish all that is implied in these two key documents. However, we believe that by pursuing more active collaboration among our 11 regional constituents, we can accelerate progress on the ever more pressing issues affecting IOOS and our regional associations. We need to actually become the "one-voice" that NFRA needs to represent. To accomplish this, we suggest that you consider articulating a process that provides for the collaborative development of member approved NFRA policy recommendations, positions concerning IOOS, and the developmental needs of the RAs. Some of the roles and issues that should be considered include:

- Active advocacy of the Regional Association observational programs designed to fulfill the regional roles supporting sustained observations satisfying federal, state and localized needs. We need to collaboratively develop a formal written position that can be provided to any agency, organization, or entity that reflects the positive contributions that regional observations systems do and will make in our national IOOS program, and once approved by the RA governing bodies receive the signatures of our regional representatives to NFRA for promulgation to the NOAA IOOS Program Office, other federal, private sector and interested entities.
- Actively advocate the regional associations' role and contribution to the national IOOS program with the Consortium for Ocean Leadership.
- Actively support and encourage private sector participation in regional associations and provide advocacy for the private sector in NFRA efforts to create national level support for IOOS.

- Actively support NOAA's IOOS Program Office and its Congressional task in coordinating the national IOOS program while effectively interacting with all interested federal programs to both establish their own defined contributions to the national IOOS program line, as well as their support to regional programs that could effectively support their observational needs.
- Actively work with NOAA's Program Office to continue to develop an effective concept of operations that will transition regional associations from their developmental stage to operational status. This will require the careful consideration and formulation of policies that are supported by the regional associations and their clear articulation and presentation to NOAA and other agencies, organizations and entities. This should include the clear articulation of:
 - NOAA contractual requirements for the regional associations, i.e., data collection and performance requirements,
 - recommended timelines for the RA's transition to operations,
 - an established national policy on liability issues and continued support of legislative efforts to achieve this,
 - acceptable contract vehicles that will provide for multi-year support of RA operations that replaces the current ineffective competitive grant process and replaces the Principle Investigator approach with a Regional Board of Directors or other governing body. This contractual vehicle must include the appropriate oversight and management controls to allow the proper audit and accountability of the regional programs that will enable NOAA to maintain the effectiveness of the regional program and its organization.
- Establish a formalized process for the regional associations to collaboratively develop, vet, review, build consensus, and promulgate national policy and position initiatives and statements that reflect the regional association support of the national IOOS and our interests.
- Update the existing out-of-date documents outlining NFRA functions, terms of reference and mission statement.

In closing, please know we are very excited about NFRA's invitation to address the upcoming IWGOO meeting in late March. This invitation is truly an excellent opportunity for NFRA. It would be a powerful statement to demonstrate that the governing bodies of the nascent regional associations are indeed speaking with "one voice" via NFRA. We certainly offer our support to assist NFRA and our Director, Ms. Josie Quintrell, in addressing this opportunity, as well as the issues outlined above. We are confident the other governing bodies of our constituent regional associations are equally willing to support a more proactive role for NFRA as our national advocate.