



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on September 22, 2009

Federalizing the Nation's Waters

President Obama wants to centralize oversight of the nation's waters along our coastlines and Great Lake shores, synthesizing federal, state, and other agencies into one comprehensive national system.

His Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, appointed in June, has just released its [interim report](#), posted at the White House website for a 30-day public review and comment period. The report recommends the integration so regulators can consider marine regions as a whole when issuing rules, especially for the sake of marine ecosystem health.



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The task force, comprised of individuals from Obama's cabinet and various federal agencies, expects its final report in December to focus on integrating regulatory efforts with environmental science through the creation of a National Ocean Council. This new bureaucratic agency would be in charge of regulating all marine and Great Lakes coasts in the United States but would not necessarily be responsible for basing regulatory decisions on scientific fact. One of the recommendations the report makes regarding oversight is that:

Decisions affecting the ocean, our coasts and the Great Lakes should be informed by and consistent with the best available science. Decision making will also be guided by a precautionary approach as reflected in the Rio Declaration of 1992 which states in pertinent part, "[w]here there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

The report also assures readers that all work of the National Ocean Council "would be implemented in a manner consistent with applicable international conventions and agreements and with customary international law as reflected in the [Law of the Sea Convention](#)."

The idea of nationalizing marine oversight is not new to the Obama administration. President George W. Bush appointed a Commission on Ocean Policy in 2004 in response to environmentalists' demands for federal oversight of coastal regulations. The commission expired late the same year, but not before it had laid out a blueprint for a comprehensive national ocean policy. Unlike the Bush commission, Obama's "temporary" task force has no set expiration date.



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