

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 23, 2009

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke and Under Secretary Lubchenco:

We continue to have serious concerns about the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's proposal to move its Marine Operations Center-Pacific (MOC-P) from its decades-long home in the Puget Sound to a new location in Newport, Oregon. In particular, we are concerned that the proposed location does not contain the number and assortment of marine services necessary to maintain NOAA's Pacific fleet.

For forty years, NOAA has enjoyed the benefits of strategically locating its MOC-P and homeporting its vessels in a region that provides the scientific, material and labor resources to support and maintain NOAA's fleet. NOAA recognized the importance of locating the MOC-P in close proximity to ship repair facilities and workforce in its Solicitation for Offer. The number four overall factor included in the Solicitation for Offers was "proximity to 'for-hire' labor," which included qualified full service ship repair contractors, ship fitters, riggers, marine welders, pipe fitters, and various other marine mechanics and specialists. NOAA's number ten factor was the proximity of the proposed site to a "shipyard/dry dock." These two factors were placed high in importance because ships need constant maintenance to ensure they are capable of performing their scientific missions and meeting their full service lives.

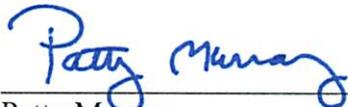
The Puget Sound offers shipyards and marine companies that are able to perform both routine maintenance and major overhauls of NOAA vessels. NOAA routinely utilizes shipyards and businesses in the Puget Sound to handle minor and major repairs. In recent years, two Puget Sound shipyards, Todd Pacific Shipyards in Seattle and Puglia Fairhaven Shipyard in Bellingham, teamed up to convert the *Okeanos Explorer* from a naval surveillance vessel into a world-class research platform for NOAA. A large and skilled work force in the Puget Sound was capable of handling this complicated task and can certainly address the more routine maintenance needs of the NOAA vessels.

In contrast, the small and relatively remote community of Newport, Oregon lacks both the size and diversity of the “for-hire labor” that is present in a large maritime center like the Puget Sound region. Newport lacks a drydock or shipyard and a scan of the business directory of the Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce reveals only four listings under “Marine Electronics/Equipment/Supplies.” Some of these businesses are general construction and construction machinery providers but are not capable of addressing the specialized needs of a complex research vessel like the *Bell Shimada*.

While NOAA did include proximity to shipyards and ‘for-hire’ labor in its list of technical criteria, we are deeply concerned that NOAA still chose a location for the MOC-P that, by all appearances, fails to meet those criteria. Furthermore, NOAA failed in its obligation to taxpayers to analyze and understand the implications of choosing a location that does not meet those criteria. NOAA selected the site of Newport, Oregon without even a cursory analysis of the costs or logistical consequences of locating its ships and facilities in a small community hundreds of miles from the nearest major maritime center. Ranking sites by scoring a long list of criteria is of little use to NOAA if the agency does not actually understand the long-term implications of its choice.

We believe NOAA did not sufficiently consider the long-term costs and consequences of moving its research vessels hundreds of miles away from the shipyards and services that it will depend on to maintain its vessels. We request that you take a fresh look at these vital questions and conduct a formal independent review of these issues in the context of whether moving NOAA’s Marine Operations Center – Pacific to Newport, Oregon is truly a wise decision for NOAA, its employees, and its scientific missions.

Respectfully,



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator
Chair, Subcommittee on Oceans,
Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard



Jim McDermott
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee
Member of Congress



Brian Baird
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Dave Reichert
Member of Congress