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Addressing Water Quality

On September 20th, 2004, *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century* was released by the U.S Commission on Ocean Policy. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy was a committee comprised of 16 members that all came from different backgrounds. The U.S Commission on Ocean Policy was created in response to the Oceans Act of 2000. *An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century* features numerous recommendations for a new ocean policy. The report as a whole lays out a comprehensive blueprint for effective ocean policy in the 21st century. The specific recommendations listed in the report promote the sustainable use of the oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes. The report features over 200 recommendations that relate to different problems the ocean faces such as fishery management, habitat conservation, and water quality.[[1]](#footnote-1) The commission addresses coastal water pollution in the report, mentioning how our oceans and coasts are being threatened by dangerous pollutants and other sources. The report makes several recommendations in attempt to reduce pollution and improve the water quality in the United States.

One specific recommendation made in the report sought out to improve the control of

point sources. Recommendation 14-1 states “The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), working with states, should require advanced nutrient removal for wastewater treatment plant discharges that contribute to degradation of nutrient-impaired waters as needed to attain water quality standards. EPA should also determine the extent of the impact of chemicals in wastewater from residential and industrial sources, including pharmaceuticals”. [[2]](#footnote-2) Under this recommendation, the commission listed other specific actions the EPA should take. The commission recommended that the EPA should support the development of new technologies and support research that pertain to biological nutrient removal to eliminate hazardous elements from wastewater discharges.[[3]](#footnote-3) I picked this specific recommendation because water quality is essential for drinking water and healthy ecosystems and waterways. Poor water quality often stems from heavily polluted waters and will lead to negative effects on human health and the environment. Although all states have water quality standards set, the nation still has waterways that are flowing with dangerous chemicals. Wastewater, which is addressed in this specific recommendation, is one of the largest point sources of pollution in the nation.[[4]](#footnote-4) The recommendation addresses the drawbacks of sewage system overflows, and how it affects our waterways. I think this specific recommendation is extremely important in revolutionizing management in ocean governance because the state of our oceans and the economy are linked together.

In 2005 and 2012 the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative (JOCI) released report cards that distributed grades to different areas including National Leadership, research, science and education, funding, and more. The report cards also gave comments on notable progress and improvements that could be made on each area. In the 2005 JOCI report card water quality was not specifically mentioned, but could have fit in the category “Research, Science, and Education”. In 2005 this category received a “D” for a grade. In the comments it was mentioned how there was an “absence” of ocean and stewardship ethic. Although water quality is not specifically mentioned here, it still relates to science and ocean stewardship.[[5]](#footnote-5) JOCI released another report card in 2012, where research, science, and education received a “C” for a grade. Since 2005, this category has improved with some progress. Although, since 2005 there have been funding and program cuts.[[6]](#footnote-6) Water quality is mentioned in the JOCI 2012 report card under the section titled “National Support and Leadership”. This section mentions the National Ocean Council and how they have numerous objectives including marine spatial planning, ecosystem-based management, and water quality.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In 2013, President Obama released the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan.

The National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan was released to promote the ocean economy and resilience. The plan included input from various different sources including the public, scientists, tribes, and stakeholders.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Implementation Plan mentions the need to improve water quality in section six, “Coastal and Ocean Resilience”. This section mentions how one of the main causes of poor water quality is due to pollution from a number of sources. The plan discusses how federal agencies will work together to support ocean and coastal habitats, ecosystems, and water quality through stewardship. The Implementation Plan is very conservation based and focuses on protecting ocean habitats. This can be done through a number of ways including the improvement of water quality.

Eight years later, President Trump released an Executive Order that pertained to advancing the economy, security, and environmental interests of the United States.[[9]](#footnote-9) This Executive Order did not relate to water quality or stewardship. This executive order focuses on short term economic goals and revokes the 2010 Executive Order issued by Obama. Trump takes the emphasis off of stewardship and onto security and the economy. Trump also completely reorganizes the National Ocean Council in his Executive Order as well as a Subcommittee for Science and Technology. After reading through Trump’s Executive Order, it does not appear that any changes will be made regarding water quality or stewardship in general. The Trump Administration seems as if it is taking a significantly different approach to ocean governance. [[10]](#footnote-10) The priorities in Trump’s executive order are drastically different from the priorities in Obama’s Executive Order. Diversity, conservation, sustainability, and stewardship are no longer a main concern.

State efforts have also shown in interest in improving water quality. In the 2004 Ocean Task Force report the state of Massachusetts mentions water quality as being a high priority. In this 2004 report, Massachusetts mentions how they have not chosen to directly address water quality because they are already being addressed by other authorities.[[11]](#footnote-11) A 2015 report released by Massachusetts mentions that an advisory group will examine issues that may have potential effects on water quality. [[12]](#footnote-12) Rhode Island also recognizes the need to continue improving water quality. In Volume 1 of the “Special Area Management Plan”, Rhode Island mentions that the overflow of wastewater sewer systems may reduce water quality.[[13]](#footnote-13) This specifically relates to the recommendation made by USCOP.

Overall, I am optimistic about the recommendations USCOP made in 2004. Specifically, I am fairly optimistic about the recommendation made about water quality and wastewater. Many local and state governments have plans in effect to improve water quality. Also, all states have water quality standards that must be met. There are various actions that are taking place in order to address water quality problems. Fortunately, water quality is an issue that has solutions, and can be improved. States such as Massachusetts and Rhode Island are taking initiative to address this issue and other problems. Water quality is an issue that has arisen in many reports since the Stratton Commission and is still highly important today.

1. An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century.” *U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy: Documents*, 20 Sept. 2004, govinfo.library.unt.edu/oceancommission/documents/full\_color\_rpt/welcome.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Addressing Coastal Water Pollution.” *U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy: Documents*, US Commission on Ocean Policy, 20 Sept. 2004, govinfo.library.unt.edu/oceancommission/documents/full\_color\_rpt/welcome.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Joint Ocean Commission Initiative - Home.” *Joint Ocean Commission Initiative - Home*, www.jointoceancommission.org/. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “U.S Ocean Policy Report Card 2012.” *Joint Ocean Commission Initiative - U.S. Ocean Policy Report Card 2012*, 1 June 2012, www.jointoceancommission.org/en/policypriorities/Report\_Cards/2012-report-card.aspx. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “Obama Administration Releases Plan to Promote Ocean Economy and Resilience.” *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, 16 Apr. 2013, obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/ceq/Press\_Releases/April\_16\_2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “Executive Order Regarding the Ocean Policy to Advance the Economic, Security, and Environmental Interests of the United States.” *The White House*, The United States Government, 19 June 2018, www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-regarding-ocean-policy-advance-economic-security-environmental-interests-united-states/. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Executive Order Regarding the Ocean Policy to Advance the Economic, Security, and Environmental Interests of the United States.” *The White House*, The United States Government, 19 June 2018, www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-regarding-ocean-policy-advance-economic-security-environmental-interests-united-states/. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “The Massachusetts Ocean Management Task Force Report and Recommendations.” *Mass.gov*, Mar. 2004, www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/08/ql/waves-of-change.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “2015 Massachusetts Ocean Management Plan.” *Mass.gov*, 6 Jan. 2015, www.mass.gov/service-details/2015-massachusetts-ocean-management-plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Rhode Island Ocean Special Area Management Plan: Ocean SAMP - Volume 1.” *Tethys*, 19 Oct. 2010, tethys.pnnl.gov/publications/rhode-island-ocean-special-area-management-plan-ocean-samp-volume-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)