

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
STATEMENT OF THE DEPUTY MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANOGRAPHY,
GULF OF MEXICO AND THE OUTER CONTINENTAL SHELF
OF THE
MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES COMMITTEE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
DREDGING PROCESS HEARING
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Good morning. I would like to thank members of the Subcommittee for the for the invitation to testify today. My name is Joan Yim and I am the Deputy Administrator of the Maritime Administration in the Department of Transportation.

About 95 percent of all United States exports and imports pass through U.S. ports and the Clinton Administration regards ports as a tremendously valuable national economic asset -- one that must be preserved and strengthened to meet our trade and defense needs. Dredging our nation's harbors is an important part of Secretary Peña's goal to tie America together through integrating all modes and emphasizing intermodal connections at ports. The Secretary also has a goal of actively enhancing our

environment by harmonizing transportation policies and investments with environmental concerns.

Last year Secretary Peña, in conjunction with fellow cabinet members and agency heads, established an Interagency Working Group on the Dredging Process, which I chair, to review the dredging authorization and permitting system and recommend ways of improving it. The objective of the Working Group is to bring greater certainty and predictability in the dredging and dredged material disposal process, consistent with the goal of environmental protection. The Group has taken a one-team approach which the Administration is fostering by asking everyone to take a fresh look at the dredging process and consider innovative changes. It is precisely because it should not take 20 years to get a project underway that we need to stand back and look at the system of how one gets from project proposal to implementation for new navigation projects and that lengthy delays in permit processing should be avoided.

The Group's participating agencies include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service and the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, the Department of the Army's Corps of Engineers, and the Maritime Administration, which is the lead agency.

To carry out its mission, a two-tier structure was formed consisting of a policy steering committee, comprised of persons at the appointee level and a working committee, comprised of senior career officials. The steering committee is setting the overall direction and will prepare recommendations for near-term and long-term improvements to the dredging authorization and permit processes. *These are recommendations to be submitted to the fleet...*

The Group completed two rounds of 10 outreach "listening sessions" in January and February of this year which helped identify issues and potential solutions. The data gathered from the

first round indicate that there is general agreement on certain concerns including:

- o A modern and efficient port system is essential to national and local economies;
- o Consistent protocols and standards should be developed for the classification and management of contaminated sediments;
- o The dredging permitting process needs to be made more predictable;
- o Beneficial uses of clean dredged material should be encouraged through federal funding and decision-making processes;
- o Funding mechanisms must be found for alternative disposal strategies and site remediation; and
- o Upstream sources of pollution must be brought under control if the contaminated sediments problem is to be solved over the long term.

The first round clarified that the major issues also include the perceived lack of a national port dredging policy and the potential

negative impacts of contaminated sediments on human health and the environment. The second round of 10 meetings ended recently at which public comments were received on an options paper developed by the Working Group. This input will help the Group develop its final recommendations.

Each of the 28 options in the paper addresses one of the following five issue areas:

- **Federal Interagency and External Coordination** - options discuss ways to improve overall working relationships among and within agencies, as well as with non-governmental organizations and the general public.
- **Proactive Local Planning and Coordination** - options concern development of effective advanced planning mechanisms which foster greater State, local, and public participation.

- **Dredged Material Disposal** - options involve mechanisms needed to allow responsible parties to plan and more effectively manage dredged material disposal decisions, with a focus on contaminated sediments.

- **Dredging Policy** - options discuss what is an appropriate national policy with respect to dredging and at what level of government decisions should be made for allocating resources to undertake dredging.

- **Funding and Project Development** - options include whether policy and procedural changes should be adopted for funding the development, improvement, and maintenance of deep draft navigation channels and harbors, including the disposal of dredged material; and considering changing or devising new cost-sharing requirements for funding dredging-related activities.

As I noted earlier, a report of recommendations is to be presented to Secretary Peña in July.

Our aim is to develop a set of recommendations that provides short term and long term solutions, including regulatory or statutory changes and we look forward to working with you on these proposals.

Thank you.