DRAFT REPORT

Review and Recommendations:
Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process
Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel's
Program Evaluation Committee

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November 17, 2005

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SUMMARY

Since the initiation in 1998 of the Program Assessment Team (PAT) concept, the National Sea Grant Review Panel (NSGRP) has been involved in the development, implementation and continuing evaluation of the PAT process. This began in 1997 when Carols Fedderoff (representing the NSGRP), Bud Grisswald (formerly with the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO)), and B.J. Copeland (representing the Sea Grant Association (SGA)), developed the original recommendations concerning PATs into a report released July 30, 1997 entitled "*Evaluation of Sea Grant College Programs: Recommendations for the Protocol, Criteria and Scheduling for Program Evaluation*" (Disk Attachment).

An individual program undergoes a PAT review once during each 4 year PAT cycle. At the end of each year's PAT reviews, the NSGRP holds a "training session" in which the year's PATs are discussed and reviewed, and Panel members are trained to better evaluate programs. Topics such as strategic planning and metrics are examples of the material covered during this training. This document provides specific recommendations concerning the PAT Manual guidance and PAT training to improve future PATs.

After the completion of the first full cycle of PATs in 2001, a year long review of the PAT process was conducted. This review process, chaired by Dr. John Toll of the Panel, produced the document *"Review and Recommendations, Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process, Report of the Sea Grant Review's Panel Program Evaluation Committee, October 21, 2001" otherwise referred to as* the Toll Report (Disk Attachment). A significant number of these recommendations were accepted by the NSGO and incorporated in the second cycle of PATs that began in 2003.

At the midway point of the 2nd cycle of PATs, the National Sea Grant Review Panel charged its Program Evaluation Committee, at its November, 2004 Sea Grant Review Panel meeting, with making further recommendations concerning the PAT process. Frank Kudrna was appointed Chairman of the Program Evaluation Committee, and the Committee includes Peter Bell, Elbert (Joe) Friday, Manny Hernandez-Avila, Nat Robinson, Jeff Stephan, and Judy Weis.

Topics for consideration were requested from the Sea Grant Network. A formal response was sent by the SGA (Attachment 1). Support from a majority of the Committee was required for a topic to be developed into a white paper for consideration as a recommendation. The Committee considered all of those topics recommended by members of the Sea Grant Network.

The Committee established a format dividing its recommendations into three categories:

- Category 1 – Recommendations concerning the current (second cycle) of PATs, to provide added guidance or clarification for the third year of the cycle.
  7 Recommendations.

- Category 2 - Recommendations concerning the February NSGO Final Review.
  11 Recommendations.

- Category 3 – Recommendations concerning the next (i.e., third) cycle of PATs. 23 Recommendations.

All of the Category 1 recommendations (Pages 1 – 2) were accepted and incorporated into the 2005 PAT Manual. Of the Category 2 recommendations (Pages 2 - 4) concerning the February NSGO Final Review, the Director of the NSGO immediately implemented all but two of the recommendations. The two exceptions were held for later consideration (see Item 12, Category 3). The category 1 and 2 recommendations were presented to the Sea Grant Network, who were also asked for additional suggestions for Category 3 topics.

The Evaluation Committee held two conference calls to review all of the suggested Category 3 topics. Topics supported by a majority of the Committee proceeded to a white paper, which included a description of the issue/problem, a discussion, and recommendations. These white papers were collected into a draft set of Category 3 Recommendations, which were distributed to the full NSRGP. Discussion of the draft recommendations occurred at the Wednesday Panel Training Session held during Sea Grant Week (Maine 2005). NSGRP members were given the opportunity to provide additional comments up to 6/15/2005. The Category 3 recommendations were then revised, and the Evaluation Committee held two conference calls to review drafts of the recommendations.

We are extremely pleased that this document is the consensus document developed by the Committee with no minority views, by the Executive Committee, approved by the full Sea Grant Panel.

Lastly, although our Committee has made a series of recommendations to improve the National Sea Grant College PAT process, we must comment on the high quality of the existing PAT process. The Sea Grant College Programs have been given an enormous amount of latitude to run, direct, and provide matching funding for their programs, and are retrospectively reviewed by the PAT process. We believe the Sea Grant PAT model is the most rigorous and comprehensive evaluation process to be found anywhere. Ron Baird, the Director of the National Sea Grant Office, has been recognized by NOAA for his leadership in developing this program through the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Service, and an adaptation of the PAT review process is now utilized by the National Institute of Health in their reviews. We believe the recommendations contained in this report will make an excellent review process even better.

CATEGORY 1
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1.   **Cost Effective PAT Reviews.** A series of recommendations are provided to minimize cost and efforts associated with PAT reviews.

2.   **Notice Letter to Directors.** The Director of the National Sea Grant Office should send a letter to the Director and Administration in advance of any PATs being held for their Program, indicating the schedule of the PAT and the process, which will involve first, a PAT Review and secondly, an NSGO Review taking place the following February.

3.   **Standardized PAT Report Letter**. Standardized language should be developed and provided to each PAT Team and included in each of PAT report letter, which indicates the nature of the PAT review and explains the distinction between it and a second letter, which will be sent to the University following the February NSGO review.

4.   **Timely delivery of Abstracts and Publications**. The timely delivery of abstracts and publications by the various programs to the library has been a continuing problem. PAT teams should require a report that tracks the timely submittal of publications and abstracts to the Sea Grant Library as part of the review of each program and consider that under the area of "connecting with users".

5.   **Continuity of PATs**. It may be desirable for one person from a previous PAT to participate in the following PAT to provide continuity

6.   **Briefing Book Guidance**. Guidance on PAT Briefing Books should be provided to the Program to insure their completeness.

7.   **Decertification Recommendations**. Guidance and direction should be provided to PAT Teams in the event that if significant deficiencies are found the PAT can recommend that a decertification review of the Program takes place.

CATEGORY 2
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1.   **New and Additional Information**. A concern has been raised that new and additional information pertaining to the Sea Grant College or institution is considered at the February NSGO review. All available information concerning a program should, to the extent possible, be provided to a PAT Team in advance of their review. To make certain this is accomplished we recommend that the Director of the NSGO

provide clear guidance to the Program Officers to collect and distribute this information.

2. **Participation of PAT Chairs and Panel Members in February NSGO Review**. PAT Chairs and other NSGRP members participating in a PAT should be allowed to participate in the February NSGO National Sea Grant Office review of the program for their respective PAT. These Panel members should be provided any correspondence that has occurred since the PAT (i.e. Director's response Program Template, etc.). These documents will be considered confidential. They then should be given an opportunity to submit written comments to the NSGO Director to be used in the February Review. They may also be called directly by the NSGO Director if he has additional questions. However, they will not vote on actions regarding that PAT.

3. **Participation of Sea Grant Directors in February NSGO Review**. The SGA recommended that Sea Grant Directors be allowed to participate in the February NSGO. We do not support this recommendation. This review is confidential to other programs and is the basis of competitive federal funding decisions. We believe it is only appropriate for the National Sea Grant Office staff and Panel members sitting on the review who serve as federal employees at that time to participate in the review.

4. **Length of February NSGO Review**. We believe a full week to conduct the February NSGO review is a maximum. The NSGO should develop mechanisms to make the NSGO review more efficient and continue to require full participation of all participants.

5. **Consideration of Grade Change**. Currently only NSGO staff vote concerning any PAT grade changes. We believe to consider a grade for review a majority (i.e., 51%+) should be required and the Panel members (normally 2) participating in the review should also be voting members in this process. Additionally, we believe any change in a grade should not require a simple majority but require an extra-ordinary majority of 2/3 of the participants.

6. **Extraordinary Majority to Change a Grade**. At the February NSGO Review discussions take place regarding various programs during the first four days during which a majority of vote can put a program element on the Agenda for a grade change vote during the final day, Friday. Currently, a majority vote is needed to put an item on the Agenda for a change vote on Friday and a majority is needed to change a grade. It is our recommendation that the vote to add an item to an Agenda continue to require a majority, however, that an extraordinary majority of 2/3 is needed on Friday to change a grade.

7. **Impact of Director Responses**. Any responses to the PAT review by the Director (i.e. correcting identified deficiencies), should be noted positively in the February NSGO review, but not become the basis of changing a grade. The PAT review was

for the proceeding four years before these changes were in place. Sometimes responses are made to clarify a misunderstanding or error of the PAT.

8. **Justification of Grade Changes to NSGRP**. Any time grades are changed we believe they should be justified in a summary report to the National Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee and that the report should be shared with the full National Sea Grant Panel at the following closed training session. We believe as part of this report the distribution of programs should be discussed with the Panel as well as weak areas which need further clarification or training.

9. **Timeliness of Final Letter.** The final letter submitted to institutions following the February NSGO should be delivered in a timely fashion. It is our understanding that the National Office has already established a timetable for this letter to be issued within 30 days following the completion of the review which we find satisfactory.

10. **Draft Letter Review by Director.** A draft of the final report from the National Sea Grant Office to the Sea Grant Director should be sent to him/her for any corrections of fact, etc. before a final version is sent to the Sea Grant Director and the University Administration. The Director should have seven (7) calendar days to respond.

11. **Staff voting at February NSGO Review.** At the February NSGO review all technical staff members are allowed to rate programs. We believe the Director of the National Sea Grant Office should have the discretion of identifying those staff members appropriate to provide a rating (i.e. senior staff), allowing junior staff members to observe and gain added experience.

CATEGORY 3
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

GRADES AND WEIGHTS

1. **PAT Rating Sheet**. Revise PAT Rating Sheet from current form (Attachment 2) to proposed form (Attachment 3) with revised weights. These changes are detailed in Attachment 1.

2. **Final Grade/No Final Grade**. A Final Grade will **not** be added to the Rating Sheet because a Final Grade does not add value to the performance assessment process.

FIXED PERCENTAGE

3. Eliminate the discrepancy and synchronize relevant language between the PAT Manual and the Revised Policy Memorandum on NSGO Final Evaluation and Merit Funding.

4. It is *not* recommended that a minimum fixed percentage be assigned to the PAT report. However, any time a grade is adjusted at the NSGO February review, it should be fully documented and justified to the National Sea Grant Panel as a whole.

SEA GRANT DIRECTORS PARTICIPATION

5. It is our opinion that a conflict of interest does not exist and that Directors should continue to participate in PATs.

RECERTIFICATION/DECERTIFICATION (of Sea Grant Programs)

6. It is recommended that Sea Grant Programs be re-certified or re-designated as a Sea Grant College or institution, periodically, as part of a PAT Review. A significant factor in considering re-certification or re-designation shall be the PAT Review. The Sea Grant Review Panel should develop, adopt, and recommend specific guidelines and protocols concerning the re-certification and de-certification process.

PAT BRIEFING BOOK GUIDANCE

7.
  - The guidelines for the Program Assessment Briefing Book preparation are comprehensive and appropriate enough so that major changes are not needed.
  - An "Executive Summary" should be included in the front pages of the briefing book. This should summarize results, accomplishments, impacts, best management practice (if any, as decided by the program's staff) and any other important facts of the program being assessed. The bullets format is strongly recommended.

- It is very important that Sea Grant Directors prepare Briefing Books that strictly and exactly follow the guidelines set out in the PAT manual. The end of first paragraph of page 53 should be re-written to emphasize this point, and the Sea Grant Directors should be made clear on this directive.
- Examples of appropriate and generally acceptable "best" Briefing Books, as determined by NSGRP and NSGO evaluation, will be available upon request at the National Sea Grant Office.

PAT UTILIZATION OF METRICS

8. Rewrite the discussion of metrics in Appendix B of the PAT manual, and provide a specific list of metrics in the PAT manual that a Sea Grant Director would be required to include in a PAT report.

9. The Sea Grant College undergoing a PAT should reproduce this list in the briefing book and reference each one providing outcome, successes/failures, and quantitative values when appropriate (i.e. tracking statistics approximate dollar value of impacts, etc.).

DOCUMENTATION OF IMPACTS

10. Specific examples of successful efforts that have received the highest ratings from previous PAT evaluations for having provided the documentation of impacts that meet the provisions of the PAT Manual should be provided or otherwise identified to Sea Grant Programs, the Panel and PAT members.

11. The NSGO, in consultation with the Sea Grant Review Panel, should develop training that seeks to improve the identification, description, measurement (quantitative and qualitative), evaluation and reporting of inputs, outputs, outcomes, accomplishments and impacts that result from the investment of Sea Grant funds as defined in the PAT Manual. Practitioners [e.g., private industry, university (teaching or research faculty)] who have proven experience in evaluating impacts and accomplishments that flow from the investment of public funds, and in providing accountability thereof, should be engaged by the NSGCP and the Sea Grant Review Panel to assist with the subject training. Emphasis should be directed toward reviewing optional methods and means to improve the quantitative and qualitative documentation of program impacts. Training is essential in addressing the need in this area, and can be provided at Sea Grant Week, Sea Grant Association meetings, Panel meetings, topic-specific or other retreats, etc.

PAT ORIENTATION

12. In addition to reviewing written materials provided and participating in conference calls before the PAT team meets, PAT team members should review and discuss the PAT Manual guidance as a group when the Panel meets at the PAT site before the start of a

PAT. This training is especially important for non-Review Panel members of the PAT. The Review Panel members (usually the Chair and Vice Chair) of the PAT and the Program Officer (PO) should be responsible for conducing the pre-PAT training, and any additional training required during the PAT week.

ROLE OF PROGRAM OFFICERS IN THE PAT PROCESS

13. A copy of the NSGO Program Officer's Position Description and participation guidance should be periodically reviewed, and be referenced in the PAT Manual through a hotlink.

14. The NSGO should appoint a Program officer coordinator for all PAT activities. This individual would coordinate program officer activities and insure consistency.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

15. Specific examples of successful efforts that have received the highest ratings from previous PAT evaluations for having provided an Implementation Plan that meets the provisions of the PAT Manual should be provided or otherwise identified to Sea Grant Programs, the Panel and PAT members.

16. The NSGO, in consultation with the Sea Grant Review Panel, should develop training that seeks to reinforce and strengthen the expectation for improved quality, structure, content, sufficiency and reporting of Implementation Plans as defined in the PAT Manual. Emphasis should be directed at reviewing optional structures, content and characteristics of an Implementation Plan. Training is essential in addressing the need in this area, and can be provided at Sea Grant Week, Sea Grant Association meetings, Panel meetings, topic-specific or other retreats, etc.

DISTRIBUTION OF SEA GRANT FUNDS

17. The current 45-65% guide line should remain in force, however, clarification as to the basis of the computation of the percentage is needed. Sea Grant Programs should have greater flexibility to meet the 50% base funding allocated to research through an appeal process to the National Office where they feel such variances are merited. Funding sources, including base, merit, match, NSIs, and pass-through monies, may be counted towards achieving this objective. The generation of non-Federal Sea Grant sources of funds, should be limited to revenue streams that measurably advance the Sea Grant Program's Strategic Plan and Sea Grant's core program areas' effectiveness and efficiency, i.e., research, extension, education and communication.

18. The NSGO *Procedures and Funding Allocation Policies for FY 1998 and Beyond* should be revised accordingly.

FOLLOW UP TO CATEGORY 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

A: Additional Suggestions to the February NSGO Review (Recommendations 19 and 20 are the remaining recommendations from Category 2)

19. Panel members participating in a PAT should be provided any correspondence that has occurred since the PAT. They then should be given an opportunity to submit written comments to the NSGO Director to be used in the Final Review.

20. To consider a grade for review a majority should be required and the Panel members participating in the review should <u>not</u> be voting members* in this process. Any change in a grade should require an extra-ordinary majority of 2/3 of the voting members.

* The Panel had previously recommended that Panel members be voting members, however to eliminate any perceived conflict of interest we are now recommending that Panel members *not* be voting members.

21. The National Sea Grant Office should clearly define the additional information that can be considered in the February NSGO review.

B: Cost Containment

22. We recommend that programs normally be limited to a $25,000* expenditure for a PAT. We believe this can be accomplished if programs think about the ongoing elements of a PAT and incorporate matrix, data collection and presentation as a part of their normal material development process.

* Not included would be the National Office costs of providing the PAT Team, program officer and their travel expenses. Additionally not included would be the Program cost of developing documentation of their Program, which is their on-going fiduciary responsibilities under grants received.

C: Normalization/Calibration

23. The NSGO Director should focus the Final Review appellate process on rating anomalies, skewed ratings*, and *individual* sub-element ratings that are clearly statistically apparent compared to the other assessed programs.

24. The NSGO should develop/establish clearly defined/definitive protocol for changing PAT ratings during the NSGO review. The NSGO should continue to conduct routine reviews of the process and report to the NSGRP.

REWRITING THE PAT MANUAL

25. The PAT Manual does not need to be re-written; however, it needs to be kept up-to-date and revised when deficiencies, shortcomings or problems of interpretation emerge after its implementation during each PAT cycle. This report includes a series of revised recommendations.

Revised Final Recommendations

The following recommendations are divided into two categories. *Category 1* are recommendations concerning PAT's in general, these are in addition to the Strategic Planning Guidance, that was approved by our Committee and the full Panel and should be implemented by the National Office in advance of the next round of PAT's. *Category 2* are recommendations specifically concerning the next round of National Sea Grant Office February Reviews.

Category 1

1.   The Panel wants to conduct comprehensive cost effective PAT reviews. To clarify expectations, the following guidance should be included in the PAT manual.

> The Performance Assessment (PA) process is designed to evaluate the state Sea Grant program. It is an intensive period of review and evaluation. It should be viewed as an interactive session to provide information and data to the team .The PAT agenda and program during the visit, should reflect the charge provided to the team, as described in the PAT Manual. It should also reflect important issues for the team, provided by the Sea Grant Director. Sufficient time should be included in the schedule of the review to permit the PAT to deliberate and draft its report.

> To assist in containing costs and providing more time for the PAT team interactions and deliberations, only short, well focused, and highly select field trips should be considered during a PAT. The PAT is well served by interactions with Sea Grant members and university administrators. Sessions in which formal presentations of research, activities, and significant results are included should be compact, and limited in time. Such sessions can, when appropriate, substitute for field trips.

> The briefing book should address the PAT Manual benchmarks and can be assumed to have been read by the PAT members prior to the review. The sessions during the review will not necessarily follow the Manual, but will include a large proportion of the time for questions and clarification. As a guideline, all PAT sessions should include 10-20% of the allotted time for Q and A's. This includes the management as well as the scientific, outreach and education sessions.

> We recognize the time and effort required in preparing for this review, but each Sea Grant program includes a substantial amount of activity during the four years under review. A four day review every four years seems a reasonable effort to document major accomplishments and consider strategies for continued pursuit of excellence in Sea Grant programs. However, if a program feels a need for larger PAT, the Director has the option of discussing a large PAT with the PAT Chair.

We offer the following guidance to help constrain the costs of the review without reducing its effectiveness:

- Expensive venues should be avoided.
- Expensive social events, including dinners, are not expected. Instead, an efficient use of time often can be gained by combining receptions with poster sessions (normally posters would be those of faculty and students that were previously prepared).
- Field trips should be used sparingly to communicate specific aspects of a program or its context.
- Quality briefing book material depends on content, not on glossy publications. The use of CD-ROMs is encouraged to avoid unwieldy volumes of paper.
- Although much is to be gained from personal contact, in the case of highly dispersed participants, user panels may be formed through conference calls to reduce travel expenses. Conference calls may be a way to engage important industry, government and community leaders who may not be able to devote the time to attend in person.

2. The Director of the National Sea Grant Office should send a letter to the Director and Administration in advance of any PATs being held for their Program, indicating the schedule of the PAT and the process, which will involve first, a PAT Review and secondly, an NSGO Review taking place the following February.

3. Standardized language should be developed and provided to each PAT Team and included in each of PAT report letter, which indicates the nature of the PAT review and explains the distinction between it and a second letter, which will be sent to the University following the February NSGO review.

4. The timely delivery of abstracts and publications by the various programs to the library has been a continuing problem. PAT teams should require a report that tracks the timely submittal of publications and abstracts to the Sea Grant Library as part of the review of each program and consider that under the area of "connecting with users". It is imperative that, copies of final PAT letters and February NSGO reports be provided to Panel members who have served on various PATs. We believe this is a critical element to allow Panel members to follow the PAT process to a conclusion. Additionally any correspondence, received after the PAT review, from the program, should also be forwarded to the Panel members who participated in the PAT.

5. It may be desirable for one person from a previous PAT to participate in the following PAT to provide continuity

6.   Guidance on Briefing Books should be provided to the Program to insure their completeness.

7.   Guidance and direction should be provided to PAT Teams in the event that if significant deficiencies are found the PAT can recommend that a decertification review of the Program takes place.

Category 2

1.   A concern has been raised that new and additional information on Sea Grant College or institution is considered at the February NSGO review. All available information concerning a program should, to the extent possible, be provided to a PAT Team in advance of their review. To make certain this is accomplished we recommend that the Director of the NSGO provide clear guidance to the Program Officers to collect and distribute this information.

2.   Panel Chairs and other Panel members participating in a PAT should be allowed to participate in the February NSGO National Sea Grant Office review of the program for their respective PAT. These Panel members should be provided any correspondence that has occurred since the PAT (i.e. Director's response Program Template, etc.). These documents will be considered confidential. They then should be given an opportunity to submit written comments to the NSGO Director to be used in the February Review. They may also be called directly by the NSGO Director if he has additional questions. However, they will not vote on actions regarding that PAT.

3.   The SGA recommended that Sea Grant Directors be allowed to participate in the February NSGO. We do not support this recommendation. This review is confidential to other programs and is the basis of competitive federal funding decisions. We believe it is only appropriate for the National Sea Grant Office staff and Panel members sitting on the review who serve as federal employees at that time to participate in the review.

4.   We believe a full week to conduct the February NSGO review is a maximum. The NSGO should develop mechanisms to make the NSGO review more efficient and continue to require full participation of all participants.

5.   Currently only NSGO staff vote concerning any PAT grade changes. We believe to consider a grade for review a majority (i.e., 51%+) should be required and the Panel members (normally 2) participating in the review should also be voting members in this process. Additionally, we believe any change in a grade should not require a simple majority but require an extra-ordinary majority of 2/3 of the participants.

6.   At the February NSGO Review discussions take place regarding various programs during the first four days during which a majority of vote can put a program element on the Agenda for a grade change vote during the final day, Friday. Currently, a majority vote is needed to put an item on the Agenda for a change vote on Friday and a majority is needed to change a grade. It is our recommendation that the vote to add an item to an Agenda continue to require a majority, however, that an extraordinary majority of 2/3 is needed on Friday to change a grade.

7.   Any responses to the PAT review by the Director (i.e. correcting identified deficiencies), should be noted positively in the February NSGO review, but not become the basis of changing a grade. The PAT review was for the proceeding four years before these changes were in place. Sometimes responses are made to clarify a misunderstanding or error of the PAT.

8.   Any time grades are changed we believe they should be justified in a summary report to the National Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee and that the report should be shared with the full National Sea Grant Panel at the following closed training session. We believe as part of this report the distribution of programs should be discussed with the Panel as well as weak areas which need further clarification or training.

9.   The final letter submitted to institutions following the February NSGO should be delivered in a timely fashion. It is our understanding that the National Office has already established a timetable for this letter to be issued within 30 days following the completion of the review which we find satisfactory.

10.   A draft of the final report from the National Sea Grant Office to the Sea Grant Director should be sent to him/her for any corrections of fact, etc. before a final version is sent to the Sea Grant Director and the University Administration. The Director should have seven (7) calendar days to respond.

11.   At the February NSGO review all staff members are allowed to vote. We believe the Director of the National Sea Grant Office should have the discretion of identifying those staff members appropriate to vote (i.e. senior staff), allowing junior staff members to observe and gain added experience.

LETTER DATED JANUARY 21, 2005:
NSGO Response to Category 1 and 2 Recommendations

Dr. Jerry R. Schubel (Chair)
Sea Grant Review Panel
President and CEO
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Long Beach, CA 90802

I want to thank the Panel, and particularly the Program Evaluation Committee, for their timely work and excellent report on the PAT and NSGO reviews. It is clearly a significant contribution to Sea Grant's program evaluation structure and the recommendations taken together will certainly improve the process. My hat is off to Frank and his Committee for their dedication and insight, especially given the short turn-around time. We will use these recommendations to modify the process in a positive way this year. It also sets the stage for longer-term considerations as well.

Once again, the Panel has demonstrated the extraordinary value of having an outside group that provides sound advice to the NSGO Director and staff. I look forward to the continued involvement of the Program Evaluation Committee and the support of the Executive Committee throughout the critical NRC process and subsequent report to Congress.

The NSGO staff has spent substantial time reviewing the recommendations and planning how to implement many of them immediately. We initially considered the first draft of the recommendations during a two-day staff retreat last December, and more recently, at a long staff meeting called for the purpose of considering changes subsequently made in the Panel's final recommendations.

Our goal has been to implement as many of the recommendations as practicable within the short time available to us before the February NSGO review and start of the 2005 PATs. You will see from our reply below that we were able to adopt immediately a large majority of the recommendations. A few of the recommendations we have chosen to table at this time. We concluded that in these few instances, the recommendations could either be seen as changing the process unfairly in mid-stream or where the extant protocols were working sufficiently well and we could not identify a compelling reason to change at this time. We were comforted in these choices knowing that the Program Evaluation Committee would be continuing its work and that the NRC committee would certainly deliberate on many of these same issues.

Sincerely,

Ronald Baird
Cc: Sea Grant Review Panel
       Sea Grant Directors
        NSGO Technical Staff

National Sea Grant Office
Implementation Review of the
Sea Grant Review Panel's Recommendations
on PATs and the NSGO Final Review

Category 1

1. The Panel wants to conduct comprehensive cost effective PAT reviews. To clarify expectations, … guidance should be included in the PAT manual. …

The NSGO staff is in the process of revising the PAT Manual for 2005. The revisions follow closely the Panel recommendations and suggested language related to:

- The effective use of time and resources for PATs vis-à-vis field visits, presentations and Q&As at PAT sessions, reserved time for the PAT report writing, the use of poster sessions, and social events,
- Requirement that PAT briefing books follow the guidelines for briefing book content and completeness,
- Recommended length of the PAT review,
- Suggestions for control of PAT costs

Additional changes will also be made to the PAT Manual based on the recommendations made to the NSGO during the Panel's November, 2004 meeting. These recommendations are focused on the language of strategic planning and improved formatting of the "indicators of performance".

The above-mentioned revisions to the PAT Manual were made to clarify language and better capture the existing procedures of the PAT process. No substantive changes were made in the criteria or benchmarks. There are there new requirements for Sea Grant programs preparing for PAT reviews.

2. The Director of the National Sea Grant Office should send a letter to the Director and Administration in advance of any PATs being held for their Program, indicating the schedule of the PAT and the process, which will involve first, a PAT Review and secondly, an NSGO Review taking place the following February.

Each year, the NSGO Director will notify University officials of the upcoming PAT and NSGO reviews, and define the complementary nature and purpose of each review.

3. Standardized language should be developed and provided to each PAT Team and included in each of PAT report letter, which indicates the nature of the PAT review and explains the distinction between it and a second letter, which will be sent to the University following the February NSGO review.

Language will be added to the PAT Manual and to the PAT Report template to define the complementary nature and purpose of the PAT and the NSGO reviews. (Note: In a change of NSGO policy, due to the evident confusion caused by the receipt of a PAT and an NSGO report, the NSGO report will henceforth only be sent to the Sea Grant program Director, and not to higher University officials.)

4. *The timely delivery of abstracts and publications by the various programs to the library has been a continuing problem. PAT teams should require a report that tracks the timely submittal of publications and abstracts to the Sea Grant Library as part of the review of each program and consider that under the area of "connecting with users". It is imperative that, copies of final PAT letters and February NSGO reports be provided to Panel members who have served on various PATs. We believe this is a critical element to allow Panel members to follow the PAT process to a conclusion. Additionally any correspondence, received after the PAT review, from the program, should also be forwarded to the Panel members who participated in the PAT.*

Language will be added to the PAT Manual indicating the importance of complete and timely submissions of publications to the Sea Grant Library. (Added to *Engagement with Appropriate User Communities, Suggested Considerations for Evaluators*.)

With respect to PAT Reports, all members of the Program Assessment Teams already receive a copy of the final PAT report signed by the PAT Chair.

The NSGO Report for a given program will be distributed to the Panel members who served on that particular PAT. The issue of correspondence received after the PAT is discussed below. (Category 2, #2)

5. *It may be desirable for one person from a previous PAT to participate in the following PAT to provide continuity.*

The ideal of continuity of PAT membership from one cycle to another is addressed in the PAT manual and is a goal endorsed by the NSGO. The availability or preference of Panel members to visit other Sea Grant programs limits this in practice. However, where possible, the PAT Chair should seek continuity when adding the three other members of the PAT. In many instances, the Program Officer can also provide that continuity.

6. *Guidance on Briefing Books should be provided to the Program to insure their completeness.*

Overall, Sea Grant Programs have improved their PAT briefing books in accordance with the briefing book guidelines. Additional language will be added to the PAT Manual reminding programs that a well-prepared and complete briefing book is essential to PAT preparations. The current briefing book guidelines were developed after extensive discussions with the Panel and

Sea Grant Association (see Appendix F Guidelines for Program Assessment Briefing Books). The guidelines list the required information and suggest formats for presenting information to address all the benchmarks of performance.   The guidelines are also available on the Sea Grant web site. Additional references to the guidelines have been added to the briefing book in appropriate sections.

7. *Guidance and direction should be provided to PAT Teams in the event that if significant deficiencies are found the PAT can recommend that a decertification review of the Program takes place.*

The issue of decertification of a Sea Grant program is best handled outside the PAT process. A decertification finding and recommendation should not be part of the overall exit feedback at the PAT debriefing nor part of the PAT Report. The preferred handling, should such a situation arrive, is for the PAT Chair to present a formal, confidential recommendation and causal explanation for the recommendation to the NSGO Director outside of the PAT process per se. The NSGO Director, after consultation with the PAT Chair and SGRP Chair, will decide if such a review is warranted. If so, the NSGO Director will notify the University.

Category 2

1. *A concern has been raised that new and additional information on Sea Grant College or institution is considered at the February NSGO review. All available information concerning a program should, to the extent possible, be provided to a PAT Team in advance of their review. To make certain this is accomplished we recommend that the Director of the NSGO provide clear guidance to the Program Officers to collect and distribute this information.*

We have initiated a review of the information that is currently provided to the PAT by the NSGO Program Officer and will issue a revised Program Officer guideline to ensure complete dissemination of appropriate information. We will also further clarify the role of the Program Officer during a PAT visit to rationalize the sometimes-conflicting role of the Program Officer as a provider of information vs. the understanding that Program Officers should remain neutral during PAT executive session deliberations.

2. *Panel Chairs and other Panel members participating in a PAT should be allowed to participate in the February NSGO National Sea Grant Office review of the program for their respective PAT. These Panel members should be provided any correspondence that has occurred since the PAT (i.e. Director's response Program Template, etc.). These documents will be considered confidential. They then should be given an opportunity to submit written comments to the NSGO Director to be used in the February Review. They may also be called directly by the NSGO Director if he has additional questions. However, they will not vote on actions regarding that PAT.*

At this time, given that we are in the mid-range of the second cycle, we will defer on this recommendation. Implementing the recommendation would be a significant mid-stream change in procedures. We could not find a compelling reason to do so at this time.

The PAT process and the NSGO Review were designed from the outset to be semi-autonomous reviews. As such, the PAT essentially completes it function when it files the final PAT report with the NSGO Director. The PAT is under the auspices of the Panel and the PAT report is considered advisory to the NSGO Director. The NSGO review was designed to 1) consider the advice contained in the 7-8 different PAT reports, 2) consider the response to the PAT report provided to the NSGO the Sea Grant program, and 3) to use the programmatic and program officer experience of the NSGO staff to normalize across the PAT ratings.

We believe the specific participation of Panel members from each PAT in the NSGO review process, on balance, unnecessarily blurs the line between the PAT and NSGO reviews. We say "unnecessarily" because the PAT report with it findings, recommendations, and ratings, significantly and fully informs the NSGO review process. In 2004, there was an 87 percent coincidence of ratings when the PAT ratings and the NSGO ratings were compared on a weighted basis (i.e. relative to the benchmark weights for the 14 subelements). On the ratings that differed, the NSGO was higher in 7% and lower in 6% of the cases. We believe that these data argue against a major mid-cycle change. Several changes being made as a result of the Panel recommendations will help to keep the coincidence of PAT and NSGO ratings high.

We continue, however, to see an important role for having several Panel representatives participate in the NSGO review as part of the Panel's oversight responsibilities for program evaluation.

3. *The SGA recommended that Sea Grant Directors be allowed to participate in the February NSGO. We do not support this recommendation. This review is confidential to other programs and is the basis of competitive federal funding decisions. We believe it is only appropriate for the National Sea Grant Office staff and Panel members sitting on the review who serve as federal employees at that time to participate in the review.*

We concur with this recommendation. The Panel recommended rejecting this recommendation when it was first made in the Toll Committee report. We agreed with the Panel at that time and continue to do so, largely for the reasons mentioned above.

4. *We believe a full week to conduct the February NSGO review is a maximum. The NSGO should develop mechanisms to make the NSGO review more efficient and continue to require full participation of all participants.*

In the five years of the NSGO review, the length of the review has never exceeded five days with one minor exception. Last year the NSGO staff spent an extra half-day reviewing strategic plans all at the same time. We did this to test whether this approach would gave us a better perspective

from which to review the strategic planning subelements. On balance, we concluded it did not and we will revert to reviewing strategic and implementation plans as part of each Sea Grant program's session.

The NSGO Director has deemed the NSGO Review, since its inception in 1999, to be of the highest priority and an essential duty for all NSGO Technical Staff members, assisted by the NSGO Administrative Staff. Participation in all sessions is a mandatory requirement for NSGO Tech staff members.

5. *Currently only NSGO staff vote concerning any PAT grade changes. We believe to consider a grade for review a majority (i.e., 51%+) should be required and the Panel members (normally 2) participating in the review should also be voting members in this process. Additionally, we believe any change in a grade should not require a simple majority but require an extra-ordinary majority of 2/3 of the participants.*

We concur and will implement the first part of this recommendation, but we will defer implementing the second part. For the NSGO Review in February 2005, we will require a 2/3 NSGO staff majority of those participating in the ratings, rather than the simple majority (>50%), is needed for any rating that differs from the PAT rating. For many of the same reasons given in #2 above, we will continue the 2004 practice of having only NSGO staff involved in the actual rating of programs. We believe that involving the two Panel representatives who attend the NSGO review in the rating of programs has both strong pros and cons, but that the issue is best referred to the NRC committee for their recommendation.

6. *At the February NSGO Review discussions take place regarding various programs during the first four days during which a majority of vote can put a program element on the Agenda for a grade change vote during the final day, Friday. Currently, a majority vote is needed to put an item on the Agenda for a change vote on Friday and a majority is needed to change a grade. It is our recommendation that the vote to add an item to an Agenda continue to require a majority, however, that an extraordinary majority of 2/3 is needed on Friday to change a grade.*

As above, we will use the requirement of a 2/3 majority when reconsidering any rating change during the last session of the review week.

7. *Any responses to the PAT review by the Director (i.e. correcting identified deficiencies), should be noted positively in the February NSGO review, but not become the basis of changing a grade. The PAT review was for the proceeding four years before these changes were in place. Sometimes responses are made to clarify a misunderstanding or error of the PAT.*

We will implement a policy starting with the 2005 NSGO review that actions taken by a Sea Grant institution after the PAT in response to PAT recommendations will be acknowledged, but

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will not become a factor in the current NSGO ratings. All improvements made the Sea Grant institution after PAT will be more properly considered in the next PAT cycle.

8. *Any time grades are changed we believe they should be justified in a summary report to the National Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee and that the report should be shared with the full National Sea Grant Panel at the following closed training session. We believe as part of this report the distribution of programs should be discussed with the Panel as well as weak areas which need further clarification or training.*

A summary report as requested will be presented to the Panel Chair for his/her use and distribution to the Panel and Panel Committees as appropriate. The emphasis of such a report will be on greater standardization of the interpretation of the performance benchmarks across PATs and the NSGO staff.

9. *The final letter submitted to institutions following the February NSGO should be delivered in a timely fashion. It is our understanding that the National Office has already established a timetable for this letter to be issued within 30 days following the completion of the review which we find satisfactory.*

We have significantly revamped our approach to the NSGO Final Report that will result in a better and timelier document. While we have added a few additional quality control steps to the report preparation (additional staff reviews of the PO letter), we believe we can meet the 30-day goal, measured from the end of the NSGO review to the point where a final draft is sent to the Sea Grant program director for factual review (see #10 below). Each year the Executive Director will inform the NSGO staff of the schedule and deadlines for producing the NSGO Final Report, and will oversee the process through to completion.

We have also decided that, due to the apparent confusion caused by sending both the PAT and the NSGO Final Report to the university administrators, the NSGO Final Report henceforth will be sent only to the Sea Grant program. The Sea Grant program director can decide how to use the NSGO report within their university.

10. *A draft of the final report from the National Sea Grant Office to the Sea Grant Director should be sent to him/her for any corrections of fact, etc. before a final version is sent to the Sea Grant Director and the University Administration. The Director should have seven (7) calendar days to respond.*

The final draft of the NSGO Report will be sent to the Sea Grant program director for factual review and correction of minor errors prior to formal submission. We plan a 10-day response period to allow reasonable time for directors to respond.

11. *At the February NSGO review all staff members are allowed to vote. We believe the Director of the National Sea Grant Office should have the discretion of identifying those*

staff members appropriate to vote (i.e. senior staff), allowing junior staff members to observe and gain added experience.

The NSGO Director will set a minimum level of experience that will be required of new staff members before they will be asked to contribute their individual rating of programs. Nonetheless, new technical staff members are expected to be present and to participate in the discussions.

Item #1
GRADES AND WEIGHTS

ISSUE/PROBLEM

1. Are the existing four broad **rating** categories [Organizing and Management of the Program, Connecting with Users, Effective and Aggressive Long Range Planning, Producing, and Significant Results] appropriate and valid?

2. Are the existing fourteen **sub-element** categories relevant and valid?

3. Are the existing four **grade** categories [Needs Improvement, Meets Benchmark, Exceeds Benchmark, Highest Performance] appropriate and valid?

4. Do there need to be more or less **rating/grade/sub-element** categories? If so, what should they be and why?

5. Are the current **weights** appropriate and valid?

DISCUSSION

1. The four categories are sufficient. No need to go to three. Retaining four categories will also reduce the need for major transitional Final Review adjustments to be made between cycles.
2. There is no compelling evidence that justifies a fifth category or fifth grade.
3. There is no compelling need for the PAT rating categories to be aligned with the 5 rating categories required by the NSGCP Act Amendments of 2002.
4. There is no compelling need for the categories that are used to assign grades during a PAT, to be consistent with the categories that are used to assign the NSGO Final Review grades.
5. The titles/labels for both the rating and sub-element categories should clearly reflect Sea Grant's **core** components, i.e., **Research, Extension, Communication** and **Education.**
6. To the extent possible, make sure that Rating Sheet readers see the flow and correlation between the aforementioned core components.
7. Reorder the assigned weights in a numerical descending order.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. **PAT Rating Sheet**. Revise PAT Rating Sheet from current form (Attachment 2) to proposed form (Attachment 3) with revised weights. These changes are detailed in Attachment 1.

2. **Final Grade/No Final Grade**. A Final Grade will **not** be added to the Rating Sheet because a Final Grade does not add value to the performance assessment process.

Attachment 1:

Specific Changes Recommended:

A. Re-order the major categories by total weight, to reflect Sea Grant priorities and provide better focus. The categories should be listed as (1) *Producing Significant Results* (50%), (2) *Connecting Sea Grant with Users* (20%), *Organizing and Managing the Program* (20%), and (4) *Effective and Aggressive Long-Range Planning* (10%).

B. Re-order the sub-categories within each main category by percentage weight.

C. Remove the sub-category *Success in Achieving Planned Program Outcomes* from the main category *Producing Significant Results*. Distribute the 5% points from this category to *Contributions to Science and Technology* (+3% to 13%), and *Contributions to Extension, the Economy, and the Environment* (+2% to 12%).

Current Rate Sheet
[March 2005]

Organizing and Managing the Program   **[20%]**
- Leadership of the Program   (6%)
- Institutional Setting and Support   (4%)
- Project Selection   (2%)
- Recruiting Talent   (3%)
- Effective and Integrated Program Components   (5%)

Connecting Sea Grant with Users   **[20%]**
- Engagement with Appropriate User Communities   (15%)
- Partnerships   (5%)

Effective & Aggressive Long-Range Planning   **[10%]**
- Strategic Planning Process   (4%)
- Strategic Plan Quality   (4%)
- Implementation Plan   (2%)

Producing Significant Results   **[50%]**
- Contributions to Science and Technology   (10%)
- Contributions to Extension, Communications and Education   (10%)
- Impact on Society, the Economy, and the Environment   (25%)
- Success in Achieving Planned Program Outcomes   (5%)

Revised PAT Sheet
[November 2005]

Producing Significant Results   **[50%]**
- Impact on Society, the Economy, and the Environment   (25%)
- Contributions to Science and Technology   (13%)
- Contributions to Extension, Communications and Education   (12%)

Connecting Sea Grant with Users   **[20%]**
- Engagement with Appropriate User Communities   (15%)
- Partnerships   (5%)

Organizing and Managing the Program   **[20%]**
- Leadership of the Program   (6%)
- Effective and Integrated Program Components   (5%)
- Institutional Setting and Support   (4%)
- Recruiting Talent   (3%)
- Project Selection   (2%)

Effective & Aggressive Long-Range Planning   **[10%]**
- Strategic Planning Process   (4%)
- Strategic Plan Quality   (4%)
- Implementation Plan   (2%)

Item #2
FIXED PERCENTAGE

ISSUE/PROBLEM
What role does the PAT play in the determinations of the NSGO Final Review? Should a fixed percentage be attributed to the PAT Report for Final Review purposes? If so, what should the percentage be?

DISCUSSION
Pages 4 and 5 of the *Revised Policy Memorandum on NSGO Final Evaluation and Merit Funding* state: "The four-year NSGO Final Evaluation Review (henceforth, NSGO Review) is conducted by the NSGO in the year following the program's PAT visit (usually February). The evaluation relies **primarily** on the information provided by the program to the PAT, the PAT Report and ratings, and the institutional response to the PAT Report."

Page 5 of the Revised *Policy Memorandum on NSGO Final Evaluation and Merit Funding* continues: "Collectively, the NSGO staff also has access to documents on file for each program, part of the continuous and ongoing communications that occur between a Sea Grant program and the NSGO. Some of these materials **are less generally available to the PAT and represent additional information** for the NSGO to use in the evaluation process." These materials include:

- Annual progress reports
- Omnibus proposals
- Publications
- Archived information on accomplishments
- Trip reports and peer review panel visits by the Program Officer
- Topical Assessment Team reports (if any)
- Detailed Sea Grant funding information
- **Timeliness of submission of required reports and quality of those reports** [*suggested new criteria that should be added to this li*st]
- Supportive material deemed to be relevant by the Program Officer or staff

Page 7 *["NSGO Final Evaluation Process and Report"*] of the PAT Manual states: "In the year following the program's PAT visit, the NSGO conducts a final four-year performance evaluation. The seven or eight Sea Grant programs that were evaluated by different PATs in the prior calendar year are considered during a one-week period, typically in February. The criteria and benchmarks used in the NSGO review are **identical** to those used by the PAT. Effort is taken to assure that all programs are evaluated in a similar manner using the **same** standard criteria and performance benchmarks listed above and described in detail in the PAT Manual.

Regarding the question "*What role does the PAT report play in the determinations of the NSGO Final Review?*": The above excerpts demonstrate that there is a contradiction between the PAT Manual and the Revised Policy Memorandum on what sources are used in the Final Review for determining a Final Grade. Utilizing the PAT Report as what the NSGO calls its *primary* basis for determining a Final Grade, it is entirely appropriate for the NSGO to use additional relevant

source documents such as those delineated. The Panel therefore feels that the language needs to be synchronized between the PAT Manual and the Revised Policy Memorandum regarding what additional source documents are used to make Final Review Decisions.

Regarding the questions, *"Should a fixed percentage be attributed to the PAT Report for Final Review purposes? If so, what should the percentage be?"*: The Panel does not feel implementation of a fixed percentage for the PAT is warranted, as 1) the NSGO and the PAT use the same rating criteria and 2) agreement between the PAT Report ratings and the NSGO ratings is substantially high (for the first two years of this second cycle of PATs, NSGO and PAT Ratings were the same **87%** of the time for Sea Grants Programs subjected to the Final Review in February 2004, while NSGO and PAT Ratings were the same **92%** of the time for Sea Grants Programs subject to Final Review in February 2005, data supplied by the NSGO). These facts demonstrate that the current way of doing business works extremely well, and the need for an explicit fixed percentage formula has not been effectively demonstrated.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

3. Eliminate the discrepancy and synchronize relevant language between the PAT Manual and the Revised Policy Memorandum on NSGO Final Evaluation and Merit Funding.

4. It is *not* recommended that a minimum fixed percentage be assigned to the PAT report. However, any time a grade is adjusted at the NSGO February review, it should be fully documented and justified to the National Sea Grant Panel as a whole.

ITEM #3
SEA GRANT DIRECTORS PARTICIPATION

ISSUE/PROBLEM
Since the start of the PAT process, Sea Grant Program Directors have participated as members on PAT Teams with full member authority. With the congressional mandate to rank programs into 5 "categories" and the limited number of programs in each of the two highest categories (to a maximum of 25% of all programs per category), it is possible for .01 of a point to change a program category and merit funding. A Director's participation as a full PAT member could therefore be seen as a conflict of interest or a perceived conflict of interest.

DISCUSSION
A Director's participation in a PAT is valuable from two standpoints. First, as part of a PAT Team, a Director provides insight in the operation and administration of Sea Grant Programs. Secondly, the Director gains a valuable insight into the kinds of issues identified and reviewed by a PAT Team. Participation in a PAT has provided a great opportunity for new Directors to more fully understand the PAT process before their Program Evaluation takes place, or to see areas where a Topical Assessment Team, TAT, might be appropriate for their program before a PAT takes place.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

5. It is our opinion that a conflict of interest does not exist and that Directors should continue to participate in PATs.

RECERTIFICATION/DECERTIFICATION
of Sea Grant Programs

ISSUE/PROBLEM

OMB and other entities have previously recommended that Sea Grant Programs be re-certified or re-designated on a reasonable and regular schedule. NOAA has recently moved in the direction of such a concept by requiring a review/re-competition of joint institutes.

DISCUSSION

The issues of re-certification and re-designation of Sea Grant Programs are outstanding issues with OMB, Congress, the Department of Commerce and other entities. These concerns should be taken seriously, in that these entities influence the Congressional authorization, Congressional appropriation, agency-level budgetary allocation, intra-and-inter-agency standing, overall perception and awareness of, and ultimate sustainability of the National Sea Grant College Program as a separate, distinct and valuable conduit for the investment of public funds vis-à-vis other federally appropriated entities within and outside of NOAA that claim to pursue similar goals and objectives as the NSGCP.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

6. It is recommended that Sea Grant Programs be re-certified or re-designated as a Sea Grant College or institution, periodically, as part of a PAT Review. A significant factor in considering re-certification or re-designation shall be the PAT Review. The Sea Grant Review Panel should develop, adopt, and recommend specific guidelines and protocols concerning the re-certification and de-certification process.

Item #5
PAT BRIEFING BOOK GUIDANCE

ISSUE/PROBLEM
Was past guidance for the preparation of the PAT Briefing Book acceptable, as experienced in the last two cycles? Did all programs strictly follow the "Guidelines for Program Assessment Briefing Book" recommendations, as specified in the PAT Manual? Do the guidelines for the preparation of PAT briefing books need improvement or substantial changes?

DISCUSSION
The guidelines for the preparation of PAT briefing books (as presented in the PAT Manual Appendix E, pages 52 to 56), were initially recommended by the "Toll Committee" to address the issues of excessive "time spent in preparing for PAT's reviews and the excessive size of the briefing books." The SG Review Panel (NSGRP) clarified the issue of length by unanimously approving a resolution that determined the guidelines that are presented in the current PAT Manual. This resolution took into consideration the comments of the Sea Grant Network. The recommended guidelines represent the thoughts and recommendations of all those who were involved in the development and preparation of the Program Assessment Manual to stipulate the rules and regulations for the performance of a Program Assessment (PA) process.

This issue has come up again within the Program Evaluation Committee deliberations respecting the Manual. Following concerns expressed by members of the committee, a thorough review of the guidelines in the PAT Manual was undertaken. The review has revealed that the guidelines are appropriate and understandable, and that only minor changes in wording are needed. All concerns expressed by committee members have been incorporated or were already included in the guidelines. The table's format for the inclusion of results and data of other accomplishments shown in the examples of the "Possible Format for Appendix 1" are appropriate. "Expected Indicators of Performance and Other Issues of Import" are all inclusive of the issues raised within the Program Evaluation Committee.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

7.
- The guidelines for the Program Assessment Briefing Book preparation are comprehensive and appropriate enough so that major changes are not needed.
- An "Executive Summary" should be included in the front pages of the briefing book. This should summarize results, accomplishments, impacts, best management practice (if any, as decided by the program's staff) and any other important facts of the program being assessed. The bullets format is strongly recommended.
- It is very important that Sea Grant Directors prepare Briefing Books that strictly and exactly follow the guidelines set out in the PAT manual. The end of first paragraph of page 53 should be re-written to emphasize this point, and the Sea Grant Directors should be made clear on this directive.
- Examples of appropriate and generally acceptable "best" Briefing Books, as determined by NSGRP and NSGO evaluation, will be available upon request at the National Sea Grant Office.

Item #6
PAT UTILIZATION OF METRICS

ISSUE/PROBLEM
How can metrics be structured to reduce the inconsistency in the treatment of metrics by various Sea Grant programs that PATs have found?

DISCUSSION
The PAT Manual (March 2005 version) discusses metrics in Appendix B, with a specific focus in section III (pages 36 – 44) on developing such indicators. In performance analysis, "Metrics" refers to a "quantitative or semi quantitative measure of defined or required objectives or parameters, and of accomplishments therein." While this discussion of the Metrics concepts provides a good basic understanding, it appears to be taken primarily from business applications (Ref. and Geisler, 2001; and Earle, Carden, and Smutylo, 2001), and thus, at times, swerves a bit off the mark for Sea Grant Programs. For example, such items as New and Improved Products, Cost Savings, Revenue, Market Share, and Profits are given to guide Sea Grant on "economic value created by scientific and technological investments," while section II (page 36), titled "Creating Value through the Sea Grant Enterprise" uses both a trite phrase, "creating value," and an inappropriate business term, as the Sea Grant program does not conform to the common definition of an enterprise. Along with the emphasis on business terminology, the entire discussion tend to be wordy, and is probably only of limited use for the PAT. It is therefore suggested that future versions of the PAT manual rework Appendix B to provide a crisp, simple discussion of the development and application of "Metrics."

This new section should also include a simple list, taken from the Metrics Committee Report, of "metrics" for use in evaluations. This list should be provided in the PAT manual, and Sea Grant College programs undergoing a PAT should reproduce the list in the Briefing Book, referencing each metric, and provide outcomes, successes/failures, and quantitative values when appropriate (i.e. tracking statistics, approximate dollar values of impacts, etc.) Current PAT evaluation sometimes can lose sight of the primary reasons for the Sea Grant Program, for example addressing coastal problems, describing the determination of causes, providing assessment of the solutions, and tracking outcomes over time. These program priorities should be emphasized in the metrics list.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

8. Rewrite the discussion of metrics in Appendix B of the PAT manual, and provide a specific list of metrics in the PAT manual that a Sea Grant Director would be required to include in a PAT report.

9. The Sea Grant College undergoing a PAT should reproduce this list in the briefing book and reference each one providing outcome, successes/failures, and quantitative values when appropriate (i.e. tracking statistics approximate dollar value of impacts, etc.).

Item #7
DOCUMENTATION OF IMPACTS

ISSUE/PROBLEM
The documentation of impacts that are provided to Program Assessment Teams (PATs) by Sea Grant Programs varies widely in quality and content. In general, Sea Grant Programs have not documented impacts as well as should be expected, or as is outlined in the PAT Manual. A review of PAT Reports clearly indicates that a need exists to improve the understanding and awareness of PAT members with respect to documentation of program impacts, and the reporting of such. National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) Program Officers and staff and Panel members can also benefit from a greater understanding and awareness with respect to documenting program impacts. How can we improve the implementation of methods, means and protocols for the quantitative and qualitative documentation of impacts that are required in the PAT Manual, and the quality of the produced documentation?

DISCUSSION
The PAT Manual clearly emphasizes the importance of documenting program impacts (page 10), in particular, stating "the listing and discussion of program impacts in the report are critical to establishing the record of performance both for the program and for the Sea Grant Network." Appendix B of the PAT manual, Indicators of Performance for Program Evaluation, defines impacts as "long-term results of a program's activities that have scientific, economic or social benefits," and provides metrics of performance measurements to assess these impacts, while acknowledging the "complex analysis and synthesis … of both a quantitative and qualitative nature" necessary to perform this assessment.

While the PAT Manual states the importance of and protocols for documenting impacts, completion of this charge currently requires improvement. The Sea Grant Review Panel, PATs, Sea Grant Programs and the NSGO must improve the rigor that is applied to quantitatively and qualitatively identifying, describing, evaluating, measuring and reporting inputs, outputs, outcomes, accomplishments and impacts that result from the investment of Sea Grant funds. Sea Grant Programs must improve their reporting and identification of outcomes, accomplishments and impacts. The mandate for rating and evaluation that governs the distribution of Congressionally appropriated and merit funds among and between Sea Grant Programs (i.e., P.L. 107-299; H.R. 3389, "National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002") validate this need. The competitive standing of the NSGCP is enhanced vis-à-vis other federal agency entities that claim to pursue similar goals and objectives as the NSGCP by an improved ability and process for addressing this challenge, especially in light of the current federal fiscal environment that influences appropriations and allocations between, among and within agencies.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

   10. Specific examples of successful efforts that have received the highest ratings from previous PAT evaluations for having provided the documentation of impacts that meet the provisions of the PAT Manual should be provided or otherwise identified to Sea Grant Programs, the Panel and PAT members.

11. The NSGO, in consultation with the Sea Grant Review Panel, should develop training that seeks to improve the identification, description, measurement (quantitative and qualitative), evaluation and reporting of inputs, outputs, outcomes, accomplishments and impacts that result from the investment of Sea Grant funds as defined in the PAT Manual. Practitioners [e.g., private industry, university (teaching or research faculty)] who have proven experience in evaluating impacts and accomplishments that flow from the investment of public funds, and in providing accountability thereof, should be engaged by the NSGCP and the Sea Grant Review Panel to assist with the subject training. Emphasis should be directed toward reviewing optional methods and means to improve the quantitative and qualitative documentation of program impacts. Training is essential in addressing the need in this area, and can be provided at Sea Grant Week, Sea Grant Association meetings, Panel meetings, topic-specific or other retreats, etc.

Item #8
PAT ORIENTATION

ISSUE / PROBLEM

PAT Manual orientation for Panel Members, Program Assessment Teams (PATs) and Sea Grant Directors (SGD) should be consistently undertaken and instituted prior to the commencement of the PAT. The NSGRP should have an orientation session specifically on the periodic revisions, changes incorporated and possible new interpretations of the PAT Manual recommendations during each annual meeting.

DISCUSSION

There is no doubt that PAT Manual orientation is critically needed and absolutely necessary. NSGO should provide targeted training to Panel Members and PATs, outside members, and to all Sea Grant Directors, especially those whose programs are scheduled for the PAT process. During such training, a thorough review of the PAT Manual, and any new revisions, stressing the intent of each section need to be emphasized. It should be pointed out, especially to outside PAT members, that the Manual is what rules and guides the PAT process; guidelines should be strictly followed and detailed recommendations fully observed. It must also be emphasized to all that the Manual delineates each of those sections that have to be fully explored. These are also to be considered and included in reference to the write-up of the PAT report.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

12. In addition to reviewing written materials provided and participating in conference calls before the PAT team meets, PAT team members should review and discuss the PAT Manual guidance as a group when the Panel meets at the PAT site before the start of a PAT. This training is especially important for non-Review Panel members of the PAT. The Review Panel members (usually the Chair and Vice Chair) of the PAT and the Program Officer (PO) should be responsible for conducing the pre-PAT training, and any additional training required during the PAT week.

Item #9
ROLE OF PROGRAM OFFICERS IN THE PAT PROCESS

ISSUE/PROBLEM
For purposes of the Program Assessment Process, should the NSGO Program Officers' role be a "Consultant" [Customer-Service Advisor] to the Sea Grant Program *before, during and after* the PAT process, rather than that of strictly Program Compliance Monitor?

DISCUSSION
There is a fairly detailed Position Description [PD] that currently exists that governs the NSGO Program Officers' [PO] role, functions, duties and obligations. While the PD clearly spells out what is expected, the emphasis should not be traditional compliance monitoring but on being proactive, providing effective technical assistance that adds measurable value to the assigned Sea Grant Program to achieve intended goals.

The PD for the PO needs review and revising.

The PO is in a position to know what is expected for an effective and successful PAT. The PO also knows what it takes for programs to be competitive during the Final Evaluation Process. As such, POs can be of great value to the Sea Grant Director and the PAT. The Sea Grant Program and the PAT [both PAT Chair and Members] should view the PO as a valuable resource/technical advisor.

The Sea Grant Program should tap the assigned POs knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences before and during the PAT development process. The PO can field questions, offer advice, make suggestions, and review drafts and provide helpful feedback.

During the PAT, the PO should be included in all activities, including all deliberations. The PO's input of the Program should be regularly sought during the PAT to ensure that all appropriate and relevant issues and concerns are raised and addressed. The PO however, should never be asked to vote.

There is a need for the NSGO to train and coordinate PO activities.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

13. A copy of the NSGO Program Officer's Position Description and participation guidance should be periodically reviewed, and be referenced in the PAT Manual through a hotlink.

14. The NSGO should appoint a Program officer coordinator for all PAT activities. This individual would coordinate program officer activities and insure consistency.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

ISSUE/PROBLEM

Implementation Plans that are provided to the Program Assessment Teams (PATs) by individual Sea Grant Programs vary widely in quality, content and sufficiency in meeting the provisions and expectations clearly defined in the PAT Manual. In general, programs have not followed the Implementation Plan Guidelines indicated in Appendix A of the PAT Manual. In particular, many of the submitted documents do not provide an "implementation plan, based on a good strategic plan, … integrat(ing) policy, planning, outreach, research, education, and management" for "strategy … translated into action in a priority-directed fashion" as called for in the PAT Manual. In some cases, Sea Grant Programs have presented their Omnibus to the PAT as their Implementation Plan. A review of PAT Reports clearly indicates that a need exists to improve the understanding and awareness of PAT members with respect to the evaluation of Implementation Plans, and the consistency and rigor of reporting on such plans. National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) Program Officers and staff and Panel members can also benefit from a greater understanding and awareness with respect to the PAT Manual provisions and expectations for the structure, content and evaluation of an Implementation Plan.

DISCUSSION

Sea Grant Programs, the Sea Grant Review Panel, PAT members, and the NSGO should increase their adherence to the definitions and expectations that are outlined in the PAT Manual with respect to what is meant by, and expected as, an Implementation Plan, and the relationship of such to a Strategic Plan. PAT Reports are not consistent with respect to their expectations, rating, evaluation and reporting of Implementation Plans. Sea Grant Programs are not consistent in their adherence to the provisions of the PAT Manual with respect to Implementation Plans. Improved training for Sea Grant Programs, NSGO staff, Panel members and PAT members, emphasis and guidance from the Review Panel and the NSGO, and greater consistency across all Sea Grant Programs, is needed with respect to the content, structure, evaluation and reporting of Implementation Plans.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

15. Specific examples of successful efforts that have received the highest ratings from previous PAT evaluations for having provided an Implementation Plan that meets the provisions of the PAT Manual should be provided or otherwise identified to Sea Grant Programs, the Panel and PAT members.

16. The NSGO, in consultation with the Sea Grant Review Panel, should develop training that seeks to reinforce and strengthen the expectation for improved quality, structure, content, sufficiency and reporting of Implementation Plans as defined in the PAT Manual. Emphasis should be directed at reviewing optional structures, content and characteristics of an Implementation Plan. Training is essential in addressing the need in

this area, and can be provided at Sea Grant Week, Sea Grant Association meetings, Panel meetings, topic-specific or other retreats, etc.

Item #11
DISTRIBUTION OF SEA GRANT FUNDS

ISSUE/PROBLEM
Should the NSGO suggested guidance that 45-65% of base and merit funds be allocated to research be a policy that is applied uniformly, rather than as an open ended guideline? Should additional clarification of the range be provided? Should the 45-65 range be limited to a firm baseline of 50%?

DISCUSSION
Under the **Effective and Integrated Program Components Section**, *Suggested Considerations for Evaluators*, pages 23-24 of the PAT Manual reads, "Is the distribution of funds consistent with the National Sea Grant allocation of funds policy?" If not, why not?

[It is expected that as an **operating guideline**, not less than 45% or more than 65% (ca. 50%), of base plus merit funding (federal portion) will be distributed for research and education projects awarded by an open, peer-review competitive process in accordance with Sea Grant policy for such competitions." (*Procedures and Funding Allocation Policies for FY 1998 and Beyond*.)]? [Bold Emphasis Added.]

There are several major issues regarding this section that need discussion:
1. There is confusion as to whether the 45-65% range applies to only Sea Grant funding, Sea Grant and match funding, or all funding received by the institution. Are NSI's and pass-through funds to be accounted?

2. Where a very small program exists, administrative costs are a relatively high percentage and initial start-up involves emphasis on extension, it may not be practical to achieve the minimum research dollars and conduct a fully balanced program.

3. Where special circumstances exist there should be an opportunity for appeal to the National Office to provide approval for a varying percentage.

4. First, the 45-65% range needs to be eliminated and the threshold for research funding needs to return to a firm and enforceable policy of 50%.

5. This new 50% policy [*"Is the distribution of funds consistent with the National Sea Grant allocation so of funds policy?"*] should be removed from the *Suggested Consideration for Evaluators* section and placed in the **"Indicators of Performance"** area.

6. Sea Grant Programs should have some flexibility in meeting the 50% baseline fund range allocated to research. Base, merit and matching should be counted towards meeting this policy. NSIs and pass-through funds should also be counted.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

17. The current 45-65% guide line should remain in force, however, clarification as to the basis of the computation of the percentage is needed. Sea Grant Programs should have greater flexibility to meet the 50% base funding allocated to research through an appeal process to the National Office where they feel such variances are merited. Funding sources, including base, merit, match, NSIs, and pass-through monies, may be counted towards achieving this objective. The generation of non-Federal Sea Grant sources of funds, should be limited to revenue streams that measurably advance the Sea Grant Program's Strategic Plan and Sea Grant's core program areas' effectiveness and efficiency, i.e., research, extension, education and communication.

18. The NSGO *Procedures and Funding Allocation Policies for FY 1998 and Beyond* should be revised accordingly.

Item #12
FOLLOW UP TO CATEGORY 2 RECOMMENDATIONS
A: Additional Suggestions to the February NSGO Review

ISSUE/PROBLEM
The Program Evaluation Committee issued a series of Recommendations to Ron Baird concerning the NSGO final review process. The vast majority (with the exception of two) of those recommendations were adopted and implemented by Ron Baird. Ron recommended that the two remaining issues be submitted to the NRC and be held for consideration with the beginning of the next (i.e., third) round of PATs.

DISCUSSION
The Committee believes the remaining two previous recommendations should be implemented with noted alterations, as discussed below. Additionally, there appears to be a question as to what additional data can or cannot be discussed during the February NSGO Review regarding Sea Grant College Programs.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
   19. Panel members participating in a PAT should be provided any correspondence that has occurred since the PAT. They then should be given an opportunity to submit written comments to the NSGO Director to be used in the Final Review.

   20. To consider a grade for review a majority should be required and the Panel members participating in the review should <u>not</u> be voting members* in this process. Any change in a grade should require an extra-ordinary majority of 2/3 of the voting members.

   * The Panel had previously recommended that Panel members be voting members, however to eliminate any perceived conflict of interest we are now recommending that Panel members *not* be voting members.

   21. The National Sea Grant Office should clearly define the additional information that can be considered in the February NSGO review.

Item #12
FOLLOW UP TO CATEGORY 2 RECOMMENDATIONS
B: Cost Containment

ISSUE/PROBLEM
The high estimates of PAT preparation costs provided by some Sea Grant Directors seem excessive. What actions should be taken to contain costs related to the PAT process?

DISCUSSION
We believe that additional cost containment guidance is necessary to Directors. Specifically, Directors have estimated that they have spent as much as several hundred thousand dollars on a PAT and in cases have chartered airplanes, created venues at multiple sites and brought in extensive Panels for discussion and input. We believe if Directors actually spent these amounts they are clearly excessive and inappropriate.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

22. We recommend that programs normally be limited to a $25,000* expenditure for a PAT. We believe this can be accomplished if programs think about the ongoing elements of a PAT and incorporate matrix, data collection and presentation as a part of their normal material development process.

* Not included would be the National Office costs of providing the PAT Team, program officer and their travel expenses. Additionally not included would be the Program cost of developing documentation of their Program, which is their on-going fiduciary responsibilities under grants received.

ISSUE/PROBLEM

Should the NSGO review every single facet of the PAT on each and every reviewed Sea Grant Program, or should the NSGO focus its "normalization/calibration" process on rating anomalies, skewed ratings*,* and individual sub-element ratings that are clearly out of sync compared to the other assessed programs?

DISCUSSION

Mechanics of the Final Review Process: Currently, the NSGO Final Review Process scrutinizes every facet of what the PAT does. A reasonable observation is that the NSGO duplicates the PAT process because it literally re-does the Program Assessment. A reasonable question, "Is this really necessary?"

A more meaningful and efficient approach might be for the NSGO to concentrate its efforts on rating anomalies, skewed ratings*,* and *individual* sub-element ratings that are clearly out of sync compared to the other assessed programs. The NSGO views its role as an appellate level review, and this is quite appropriate. However, considering the high rate at which the NSGOP agrees with the PAT [over 85 % in 2004 and over 92% in 2005], the NSGO only needs to concentrate its oversight on select areas, a "review by exception" rather than necessarily reassessing all 14 subelements for all evaluated programs.

It should be difficult to change a PAT. A PAT rating should only be changed by NSGO if it meets an established, clearly defined/definitive protocol. After determining that an anomaly exists, the *change process* could include such standards as: **First hurdle**: Analyze the anomaly for errors including but not limited to, misinterpretation, misapplication of information, or mistake of fact. It should be the preponderance of the evidence that triggers the change process. **Second hurdle**: In those instances when such errors are discovered, a second test should be applied as follows: "Is the correction of those errors significant enough/weighty enough to change the PAT rating?"

While implementing a 2/3's super majority-voting rule is a good start, additional measures, such as the aforementioned suggested *change process*, need to be taken to ensure integrity of the entire Program Assessment Process. The NSGO should act only to correct demonstrated and verifiable errors, using a higher standard or test protocol, and make adjustments *if and only if* gross unevenness is apparent.

Decision-making: In February 2005, 16 NSGO staff members served as the Final Review Team Members. Implementing the 2/3's super majority vote to effectuate a rating change was a good start to mitigate the prior "much too easy" process to change a PAT rating. Given the fact that not many of the participating NSGO staff members are senior level program officers, the NSGO Final Review Team should serve strictly as "advisory" to the Director and his/her Senior/Executive Management Team. The discussion phase could continue as it is currently constituted, but Ron and his most experienced, Senior Management Team would make the final

decisions. Only the most experienced Senior NSGO Management should be making such important, final/binding decisions

In theory, ultimately, the final responsibility for changing a grade always rests with the NSGO Director, who reviews all ratings subsequent to Final Evaluation Meeting. In practice however, the NSGO Final Review Team Members make decisions via their vote that are *at least* perceived as final/binding. This perception is confirmed by the established pattern-of-practice.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

23. The NSGO Director should focus the Final Review appellate process on rating anomalies, skewed ratings*,* and *individual* sub-element ratings that are clearly statistically apparent compared to the other assessed programs.

24. The NSGO should develop/establish clearly defined/definitive protocol for changing PAT ratings during the NSGO review. The NSGO should continue to conduct routine reviews of the process and report to the NSGRP.

Item #13
REWRITING THE PAT MANUAL

ISSUE/ PROBLEM
Does the PAT Manual need to be rewritten? What is the problem, if any? How about periodic revisions?

DISCUSSION
The PAT Manual has been constantly modified following its implementation during the last two PAT cycles. Findings from PAT experiences and current innovative ideas, as determined from thorough revisions and evaluations within the NSGO and the Sea Grant Review Panel (NSGRP), have been consistently incorporated into the PAT Manual. At the present time the Program Evaluation Committee is prepared to recommend a set of new procedures, several changes and minor modifications to the PAT regulations. If approved by the NSGO and the SGRP, these modifications will be included in the Manual as new policy for additional guidance in PAT implementation, to be put into practice during the next PAT Cycle.

Many individuals and professional groups, experts in planning and evaluation, have had extensive discussions and have contributed to the writing of the Manual. Minor modifications to the Manual have been continuous while it has been in use. Thus, the Manual has served well and has been employed successfully for two PAT cycles. We believe the Manual is a comprehensive, integrated document, which at times becomes exhaustive and might be considered too detailed and far-reaching. Syntax, wording, style and format can always be changed in order to make it more clear or understandable, but in general its contents are appropriate, useful and realistic. The PAT Manual needs continuous revisions, but it doesn't need to be re-written at the present time!

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

25. The PAT Manual does not need to be re-written; however, it needs to be kept up-to-date and revised when deficiencies, shortcomings or problems of interpretation emerge after its implementation during each PAT cycle. This report includes a series of revised recommendations.

Chronology of Major Events

DATE	ACTION
7/30/1997	Release of the Copeland-Grisswald-Fedderoff Report "Evaluation of Sea Grant College Programs: Recommendations for the Protocol, Criteria and Scheduling for Program Evaluation."
Spring 1998	Initiation of first PAT cycle.
Fall 2001	Completion of first PAT cycle.
10/22/2001	Release of the Toll Report: "Review and Recommendations: Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee".
Spring 2003	Initiation of 2nd PAT cycle.
11/15/2004	SGA distributes formal comments on the implementation of the current round of program assessments.
1/7/2005	Category 1 and Category 2 recommendations approved by Executive Committee of NSGRP on behalf full Panel.
1/10/2005	Category 1 and Category 2 recommendations transmitted to Sea Grant Network.
1/21/2005	Response of NSGO to Category 1 and 2 recommendations.
March, 2005	- NSGRP Category 1 and 2 Recommendations presented for discussion at Spring SGA meeting in Washington, DC. Frank Kudrna, Nat Robinson and Jerry Schubel presenters. - SGA, Extension Assembly and Program Communicators asked for further suggestions and input into Category 3 Recommendations. - Suggestions also requested from full NSGRP and NSGO.
4/6/2005	1st Program Evaluation Committee (PEC) Conference call: review suggested Category 3 suggestions; determine topics to develop into white papers.
5/4/2005	2nd PEC Conference call: review suggested Category 3 suggestions; determine topics to develop into white papers.
	Distribution of Draft Category 3 recommendations to NSGRP for review.
6/5/05	Full NSGRP meeting. Motion to Authorize the Executive Committee to present the draft report to the NRC passes.
6/7/2005	Meeting of PEC at Sea Grant Week 2005; opportunity for full Panel comments during afternoon meeting.
6/15/05	Closing date for comments from Panel on Draft Category 3 recommendations.
8/1/2005	3rd PEC Conference call: review Draft Category 3 suggestions.
8/15/2005	4th PEC Conference call: review Draft Category 3 suggestions.

ACRONYMS

NSGO	National Sea Grant Office
NSGRP	National Sea Grant Review Panel
PAT	Program Assessment Team
SGA	Sea Grant Association

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Sea Grant: Sea Grant is a nationwide network (administered through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA]), of 30 university-based programs that work with coastal communities. Sea Grant is NOAA's primary university-based program in support of coastal resource use and conservation. Environmental stewardship, long-term economic development and responsible use of America's coastal, ocean and Great Lakes resources are at the heart of Sea Grant's mission. The National Sea Grant College Program engages this network of the nation's top universities in conducting scientific research, education, training, and extension projects designed to foster science-based decisions about the use and conservation of our aquatic resources. Our research and outreach programs promote better understanding, conservation and use of America's coastal resources.

National Sea Grant Office: NOAA's National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) administers funding to the Sea Grant colleges throughout the nation and oversees several national funding competitions. The NSGO also facilitates both the Department of Commerce designation of Sea Grant College Programs and quarterly Sea Grant Program Assessments.

National Sea Grant Review Panel: Mandated by law, the National Sea Grant Review Panel is comprised of 15 individuals with diverse backgrounds in marine affairs. The panel advises NOAA's secretary, the undersecretary for oceans and atmosphere, and the director of the National Sea Grant College Program on scientific and administrative policy.

Sea Grant Director: The state Sea Grant Directors coordinate program activities, setting local, regional and national priorities. They are a unified voice for these institutions on issues of importance to the oceans and coasts.

Sea Grant Association: The Sea Grant Association (SGA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering the Sea Grant program concept. The SGA's regular members are the academic institutions that participate in the National Sea Grant College Program. SGA provides the mechanism for these institutions to coordinate their activities, to set program priorities at both the regional and national level, and to provide a unified voice for these institutions on issues of importance to the oceans and coasts. The SGA advocates for greater understanding, use, and conservation of marine, coastal and Great Lakes resources. (www.sga.seagrant.org)

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15 November 2004

Dr. Jerry R. Schubel, Chair
National Sea Grant Review Panel
c/o Aquarium of the Pacific
320 Golden Shore, Suite 100
Long Beach, CA 90802

Dear Dr. Schubel:

The Sea Grant Association would like to thank the National Sea Grant Review Panel, and Nat Robinson in particular, for inviting our comments on the implementation of the current round of program assessments. As Nat observed at the 2004 Fall SGA meeting in Newport, Rhode Island, there remains some concern among our delegates about certain elements of the National Sea Grant Program Assessment process.

First, it is important for SGA to articulate that we are committed to the long-term success of the Program Assessment (PA) process. We welcome performance reviews as one of the critical elements of an ongoing process of improvement across the Network. They serve as a credible vehicle for Sea Grant to demonstrate accountability and sound management of federal funds. We believe that the PA process sets a benchmark for others in NOAA and throughout the federal government to emulate. In addition, we believe that no matter how many good outcomes programs can show—and there are many—they should always strive to find better ways of doing things. On some level, all programs can improve and all programs can and will become "excellent." The true mark of success of the PA process to date is that evaluation has been taken on as an integral part of Sea Grant program activities and processes.

We also recognize that there are significant challenges in implementing the Congressional mandate to rate Sea Grant programs and in comparatively assessing the performance of a highly diverse group of institutions. Continuous improvement of the PA process is in the best interest of the entire Network and is important in maintaining our excellent reputation—within the federal government and among our university partners—for relevant and effective self-evaluation.

Nat Robinson asked in October if we would assemble comments on the PA process from programs across the Network and convey them to the NSGRP. We accomplished that task via a survey shortly after that meeting. Respondents voiced many comments and concerns, not all of which are included in this letter. Our intent here is to briefly highlight the most important points, however, we would be happy to convey all the comments received if the NSGRP so wishes. There was consensus among those who responded that despite the best intentions and efforts of all parties involved, the current PA process is out of scale for the amount of funds the national program has, for the people and funds Sea Grant programs have, and for the positive outcomes that result. The time and effort taken to prepare for a Program Assessment Team (PAT) visit is still perceived as excessive. There were a number of differing opinions on how best to address this issue. Respondents also emphasized the need for greater continuity and consistency in the composition of PA teams and for greater recognition of the diversity of local programs within the PA process.

With this as background, we would like to focus our comments on two issues that were the subject of many consistent responses—the NSGO Final Evaluation and the role of the NSGO Program Officer (PO). Of the many recommendations articulated in the report of the committee chaired by former NSGRP member Dr. John Toll (known as the Toll Report), several spoke directly to these issues. That they continue to challenge us in the current PA cycle suggests that a concerted effort be made to find efficient and equitable solutions—solutions that will be of substantive benefit to the PA process and the Network as a whole.

NSGO Final Evaluation
Because every PAT is different SGA recognizes the need for a NSGO Final Evaluation process to level out or normalize PA scores in relation to one another. We also recognize that some measure of quality is needed to rate one program against another as required by Sea Grant's authorizing legislation. However, it

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appears that several problems first identified in the Toll Committee Report persist. Specifically, questions remain about the Final Evaluation process being truly meritorious, clearly delineated, and transparent.

Specific SGA suggestions regarding the Final Evaluation include:
- There are significant questions about the NSGO weighting for the 14 "criteria and benchmarks" for the Final Evaluation. A full disclosure of these and how they differ from those used by PATs is needed.
- Reduce the Final Evaluation to a "leveling" of PA scores among the reviews in one calendar year and, in doing so, remove the "second program review" conducted by the NSGO.
- Use the Final Evaluation to correct obvious erroneous subcategory scores on the PAT score sheets. Corrections would be based on the letter of response from Program Directors to the PAT reports and input from the seven or eight PAT Chairs for that year.
- Include SG Directors and PAT Chairs as observers in some logical way. PAT chairs should observe on behalf of the programs they evaluated, and the Director who participated as a PAT member in a given Program Assessment could observe the Final Evaluation meeting on behalf of that program.
- The Toll Report notes that "numerical metrics must be viewed as only one of several assessment tools available within the large context of the Program Assessment process as a whole." Greater reliance on the meaningful narratives from the PATs is needed as they capture much more than simple metrics can.
- Delete the confusing Final Evaluation Report (see below) and replace it with a brief letter that includes the overall program score and the revised score sheet

Final Evaluation Report
SGA is concerned about the content and manner of distribution of recent Final Evaluation reports. Sometimes certain language can have unintended consequences for individuals and programs, a result that marginalizes the SG evaluation process. As mentioned above, the SGA prefers to delete the Final Evaluation Report. However, if the NSGO feels it must have such a report, we recommend it be clear, concise and have the following attributes:
- Feedback should always be constructive with a clear stated intended purpose.
- No item should appear in a letter of Final Evaluation from NSGO that has not been previously raised with the PAT, program director and university administration.
- Final Evaluation reports need to be better vetted before being sent out to University officials. Specifically, a draft Final Evaluation should be shared with the PAT Chair and the Program Director before being distributed to university officials.

The Important Role of the Program Officer
Legitimate and pervasive concerns about the final evaluation also focused on 1) the fact that NSGO Program Officers (POs) who are unfamiliar with many of the programs "vote" on the final status of a program and 2) those programs that had frequent changes in NSGO POs can be at a disadvantage in the NSGO deliberations. As noted in the Toll Report, an on-going dialogue between Sea Grant Program Directors and NSGO POs is a key component of program evaluation and is essential to achieve a continuous exchange of information between the NSGO and local programs.

Specific suggestions regarding NSGO POs include:
- POs should be given resources to spend more time getting to know the programs for which they are responsible. SG Directors have great respect for their POs, but regret that they are often unable to establish more substantive interactions over the course of a given review cycle. These issues were noted in the 2002 Report of the NSGRP Committee chaired by Dr. Duce as well ("Building Sea Grant: The Role of the National Sea Grant Office pg. 38-39).
- Switching of NSGO POs should be kept to a strict minimum. If this is not possible, significant consideration of this should be given during the Final Evaluation.

Reaching the Goal of Program Improvement
SGA believes strongly in the intent of the Review Process — to improve the Network and ultimately have all programs excel. Taken in total the comments from the local programs reflect the desire to use the PA process in a constructive manner to build local and Network strength. While acknowledging that "competition" was one objective of the language added to Sea Grant's authorization in 2002, the tight

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coupling of the PA process to program funding diminishes the primary focus of the process on improvement. Toward this end, we encourage the NSGRP to consider the following suggestions:

- Lessen the burden of the PAT visit.
- Decouple the PAT visit and financial reward to lessen the "event" nature of the review.
- Use some of the available funds to support programs to help them improve in deficient areas and in doing so, steer the PA concept back toward an emphasis on program improvement.

Understanding that program evaluation must include an on-going continuous dialog, SGA believes that there needs to be a thorough, open vetting of the process, which could entail another one-year analysis and reassessment after the current round is completed. We emphasize that our goal is not to eliminate the process, nor is it likely that we can ever perfect it. We do believe it is possible to configure a process more appropriate in scale and intent that will meet the needs of credibility and accountability and contribute to program improvement nationwide.

SGA welcomes the opportunity to provide these comments and looks forward to working with the NSGRP to strengthen our PA process so it may remain a model for evaluation of Federal-state-University partnerships.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Stickney
President

cc: Ron Baird, Director, National Sea Grant Office