

April 26, 2004

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Healthy oceans for sustainable future

A presidential commission's call for protecting the oceans deserves a strong response. America must take greater responsibility for the unique blessings of its oceans.

We have thought little about most of the 200-mile zone America controls along the Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic coasts. The laws, regulations and policies are inadequate for preventing ecological disasters.

To deal with the problems, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy suggests a host of changes. The most important would be establishing a National Ocean Council in the White House to oversee coordinated strategies that are based on scientific knowledge.

Coastal states like Washington have important roles in assuring that the

commission's report leads to changes. Before the commission finalizes its recommendations, Gov. Gary Locke should underscore this state's support for the strongest possible actions.

The state must also support building better regional organizations for protecting ocean fish. The commission correctly praises North Pacific fisheries' operations as the best in the country. But even here there is a pressing need for more scientific research, consideration of the wider ecosystem impacts of fishing decisions and genuine public representation in the process.

Even as more of America's population has settled along the coasts, we have done little to protect the oceans. The commission's report offers the president, Congress and the public a way to begin shaping a healthier future for the seas.