

STUART NEWS

Act to save oceans commitment Findings in oceans report demand all-out

We have long advocated increased investment in ocean exploration. A massive report issued by a presidential commission last week affirms the need for such investment.

For three years the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy has been studying how the nation oversees oceans, interviewing hundreds of scientists and visiting coastal areas. Its report says the 4.4 million square miles of ocean territory controlled by the United States is suffering severe degradation from man-made sources, including overfishing and pollution from coastal development and inland agriculture. The commission found a patchwork of federal, state and local agencies reacting to crises without an overall and coordinated plan of action to preserve and protect ocean resources. It calls for creation of a national ocean council within the White House and the creation of regional councils for the protection of ecosystems that cross political boundaries.

The commission also recommends the doubling of federal spending on ocean research and the creation of an ocean policy trust fund to be financed with up to \$4 billion annually from royalties from oil and gas exploration.

Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution in

Fort Pierce, an international leader in ocean research, had considerable input on the commission's report, which was the first federal study of the oceans in 35 years, and could be expected to play a significant role if the commission's recommendations are implemented.

Harbor Branch, for example, could provide considerable scientific expertise to regional councils in helping them to set their agendas. Additionally, Harbor Branch could be expected to receive increased federal funding to pursue research activities.

President Bush has proposed a manned mission to Mars as part of the nation's continuing exploration of space. It's an exciting prospect. But we know that there are life forms within our oceans that have yet to be discovered, which may hold keys to medical drugs and energy sources that could greatly enhance life on Earth. We know that 95 percent of the world's oceans have yet to be explored.

We are encouraged by the commission's report and are hopeful that the president and Congress will make their recommendations a major priority before the oceans pass the point of no return and we lose not only the benefits we now depend on, but the ones we have yet to find.