

ACOPS: Sparking New Hope For the Oceans

International Conference Hosted by Weldon Draws Gore, Gingrich, Other Top Administration Officials; Puts 'Oceans' on Map

By David M. Graham
Editor, Sea Technology

A remarkable, amazing event took place in early summer. The happening—ACOPS' 1997 Global Conference on Oceans & Security—looked at first glance like it would turn out to be a typical environmental conference, making the pitch for fewer fish and fewer oil wells and less pollution. But it was in fact not billed as an environmental event but as a conference *about* the oceans.

The three day conference, attended by representatives from more than 30 nations, focused on four key ocean themes—economic security, environmental security, food security, and research and defense.

As conference organizer and U.S. Representative Curt Weldon (R-Pennsylvania) pointed out in his press release about the event, the conference was not about the environment with some involvement from the oceans—it was about *sustainable development and protection* of the oceans.

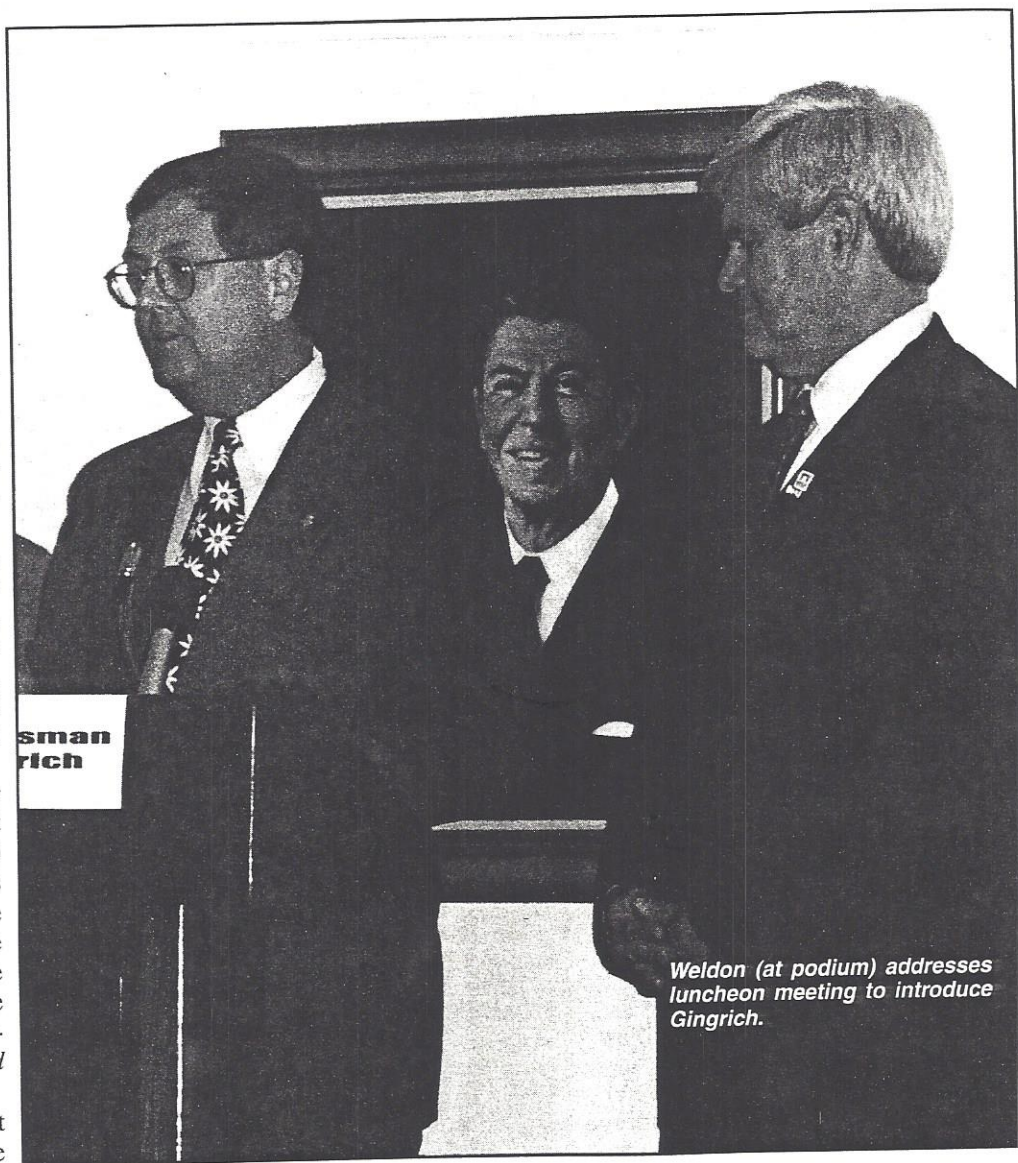
He is U.S. vice president of the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea (ACOPS), established in 1952 as one of the world's first environmental non-governmental organizations, which originally concentrated on encouraging international agreements to reduce marine oil pollution. Since then,

ACOPS has expanded its interests to include land-based sources of marine pollution as well as other aspects of degradation of the coastal and marine environment.

Weldon is also chairman of the

House Military Research & Development Subcommittee (National Security Committee).

ACOPS is a private, independent, non-party political organisation enjoy-



Weldon (at podium) addresses luncheon meeting to introduce Gingrich.

ing charitable status in the United Kingdom, funded by a variety of foundations, governmental and intergovernmental institutions, companies, and private individuals. It has a broad constituent base, consisting of international associations of local authorities, wildlife and environmental protection organisations, trade unions, academic bodies, ports and harbours, tourist and shipping industries, as well as eminent individual members which include some of the world's leading scientists, economists, and lawyers.

Formulating an Agenda

Sponsored by ACOPS, Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE USA), and the Consortium for Oceanographic Research & Education (CORE), the conference brought together international policy makers, representatives from the scientific community, academics, and private sector participants to formulate an agenda for oceans research and protection for the Year of the Oceans in 1998 and beyond.

Participating speakers and panelists from the United States included Vice President Al Gore Jr., House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Georgia), Secretary of Defense William Cohen, Secretary of the Navy John Dalton, Chief of Naval Research RAdm. Paul Gaffney, Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans & Atmosphere Dr. James Baker, Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans & International Environmental & Scientific Affairs Eileen Claussen, and U.S. Geological Survey Director Dr. Gordon Eaton. Some dozen or so U.S. members of Congress attended and participated in the three-day sessions. Several ministerial level attendees from the more than 30 other nations joined the likes of Dr. Nay Htun, assistant secretary general of the United Nations, and Ms. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, executive director of the UN Environment Programme, in presenting a variety of views on how to both protect and use the oceans in the coming millennium.

Weldon noted early on that he and other pro-ocean solons had finally gained the attention of Gore and Gingrich and now is the time to deliver the message about the importance of protecting the marine environment on a global scale. "Renewing U.S. interest is not enough," he said. Through organizations like ACOPS, GLOBE USA, and others, policy makers from around the world can jointly discuss important

environmental and sustainable development issues that effect everyone."

Gore and Gingrich spoke to the 200-plus delegates at various times about the promise of the oceans and why we should become more active in protecting them, all the while incorporating sustainable development of their resources.

Looking from Another Angle

The conference looked at the oceans from another angle. Various governments in the past have looked at

marine issues such as declining fish stocks, land-based runoff pollution, and degradation of coastal resources. Weldon points out that those same governments often ignore the fact that the individual issues are part of a larger picture.

The goal of the conference was to examine problems facing marine and coastal ecosystems and the associated impact on human well-being focusing on four main themes of economic security, environmental security, food (fisheries) security, and research and

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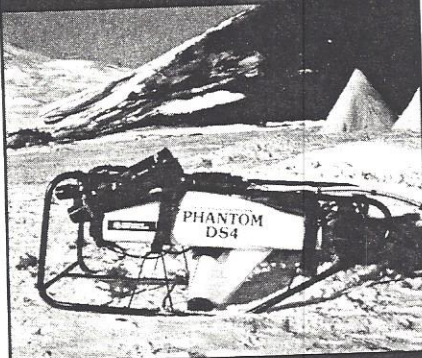
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CORE's Adm. James Watkins (center) listens to a point made by Sam Farr (D-California) during ACOPS reception in Hall of Statuary. CORE staffer Terry Schaff is at left.

defense issues (national security).

Four multinational panels representing the Oceans and Seas of the Americas, the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Oceans and Seas of the Russian Federation convened to identify problems of local, national, regional, and global importance and to propose solutions. A challenge for the several panels was to develop some general recommendations:

- International legislation and global and regional action plans for control of ocean pollution should be implemented, harmonized, and strengthened and GLOBE activities should promote this objective. The GPA on land-based activities should be supported by governments as a means for achieving this goal

- ICZM, integrated across economic sectors and between levels of government, (ecosystem management approach) should be a standard approach in the management of the coastal zone, including recognition of land/freshwater/coastal areas/oceans linkages.

- Conservation of biodiversity should be accorded highest priority, among others, through the Convention on Biodiversity

- States should support UNEP in its efforts to conclude an international instrument on the integrated management of hazardous substances including PIC and POPs

- A marine environment monitoring system should be developed using

defense and intelligence surveillance systems

- Large terrestrial ecosystems such as expanses of tundra or wetlands should be conserved in pristine conditions for their own sake as well as in recognition of their contribution to the stability of marine ecosystems.

Despite political, cultural, and social differences, several common topics of general concern also emerged. Industrialized and developing nations from each of the geographical regions called for international cooperation in addressing ocean security—including implementation of existing regional agreements and establishment of partnerships between governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations. Panelists also identified public empowerment and increased public participation in decision making as vital to solving environmental problems and necessary to establish the political will to create and enforce effective environmental policies.

Release of classified data has greatly increasing the volume of available scientific information although a need to boost the distribution of this information was recognized by the United States and others. Industrialized nations—including the United States, Russia, and Japan—discussed the potential of using both military and space technology for environmental research in the oceans. Fisheries management topics centered on a need to

move toward a precautionary approach incorporating the best scientific information available and the consideration of margins of error into the estimation of maximum sustainable yield for each fishery.

Developed and developing nations alike recognized a need to focus more on the link between the land and the sea and particularly on land-based sources of marine pollution. Representatives of a handful of developing nations pointed out the importance of considering poverty as a source of environmental degradation. Concerns were also raised over the environmental impact of clearing mangrove forests for land development and aquaculture and the destruction of coral reefs.

Aside from "getting the attention" of some high-level congressional and administration people, the conference produced a rough draft of the *Potomac Declaration*. Looking at enhanced security of the oceans in years to come, the document recognized the continuing adverse effect on marine environments of increasing human activity in coastal and marine areas, the effect the oceans have on climate and climate change, and the fact that sustainable development can *actually* increase environment, food, and economic security and will eventually provide a foundation for political security.

Broad Recommendations

Broad recommendations drawn from panel presentations led to the Potomac Declaration. Recognizing the dual threat to human well-being and marine and coastal ecosystem health due to increasing human activity in coastal and marine environments, the declaration calls for immediate action "to strengthen environmental security if global human security is to be sustained." Conference participants agreed that such actions should include the following points:

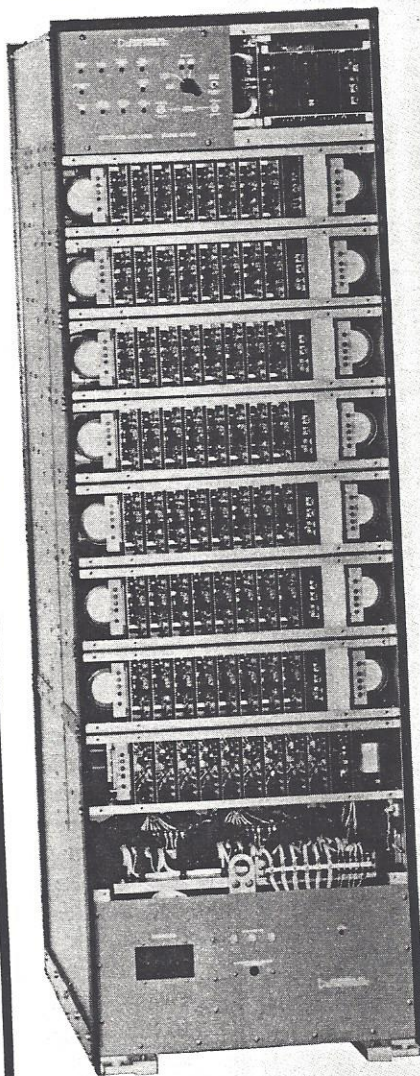
- Bringing environmentally adverse actions of economic and social sectors in line with sustainable development to enhance environmental, food, and economic security. "Policies and action by all economic and social sectors adversely affecting the marine environment and resources should be made compatible with sustainable development in order to promote environmental, food, and economic security, and to prevent conflicts over natural resources between and within states.

Consciousness of the fact that poverty is a root cause of environmental problem must guide policy making. Wasteful consumption patterns must also be addressed."

- Basing marine and coastal ecosystem management fully on precautionary and ecosystem approaches to conserve biological diversity and obtain a sustainable level of use. "Management of marine and coastal ecosystems, carried out within the framework of integrated coastal and watershed areas management and responsible fisheries,

should be based on the full application of the precautionary principle and ecosystem approach, thus achieving the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and its components in marine and coastal ecosystems."

- Directing research toward understanding marine and coastal ecosystems, including the use of innovative measuring techniques and declassified data, to serve as a basis for conservation policy. "Scientific research should be increasingly directed towards the



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understanding of the marine and coastal ecosystems thus providing a basis for policies and action for their conservation and sustainable use. Such research would profit from greater and improved access to data which has been declassified or derived from national security systems, and should include use of innovative techniques for measurement of basic parameters. The possibilities of satellite monitoring of the marine environment should be exploited to the full."

- Ratifying the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Convention of Biological Diversity, and the Climate Change Convention and addressing marine environmental degradation issues not currently covered by international agreements.

- Studying how market failures, inadequate policies and governance, and insufficient information serve as or contribute to root causes of environmental problems. "It is of paramount importance to deepen our current understanding of the root causes of the environmental issues in terms of market failures, inadequacies in policy and governance, and deficiencies in information. A profound interdisciplinary study, bridging social and physical sciences and integrating seas and associated land catchment areas, is required at a national, regional, and global level. This should lead to practical measures to address the root causes of the problems themselves. Initiatives such as the recently proposed GEF Global International Water Assessment (GIWA) should be supported."

- Implementing fisheries conservation measures based on the *FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing* and the *UN Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish*.

- Creating new and implementing existing data gathering systems to provide information on which appropriate policy decisions can be based. "Data gathering systems should be put in to place so that the information and knowledge is available for wise decision-making, especially in the coastal zones. These observation systems should be used to ensure continuous benefit. Governments should actively support global oceanic observation systems at a national, regional and global level. Scientific research and information should be directed towards wise decision-making marine and coastal areas."

- Using national security systems for peaceful purposes—most notably for increasing environmental protection. "The end of the cold war and diminution of the risk of global conflict has opened up new possibilities for utilising national security systems formerly devoted to military activities for peaceful purposes and, in particular, for enhancing the capacity for environmental protection and for sustainable development. The military establishment should share with other societal sectors its enormous scientific and technological capabilities in order to improve our understanding of the functioning of the coastal and marine ecosystems, a condition to enhance environmental security of marine and coastal areas. Each nation should initiate a review of [its] sensitive data and information, as pioneered by Russia and the U.S., for declassification and use in diagnosing environmental problems and expanding our knowledge base."

- Incorporating environmental concerns into all governmental sectors and empowering the public—especially local communities—through increased access to information and participation in decision making.

- Introducing environmental studies into school curricula to increase awareness, on a global level, of the relationship

between human survival and the health of the environment, including declaring the year 2000 as the "Year of Environmental Awareness."

- Mitigating and adapting to global climate change on a national, regional, and international level and enhancing multilateral and bilateral cooperation on reducing the impact of climate change. "Efforts should be directed at national, regional, and global levels for mitigation and adaption to global climate change, as it is likely to threaten the lives and livelihood of millions of people via sea-level rise, changes in ocean salinity, temperature, and production

"Gore and Gingrich spoke to the 200-plus delegates at various times about the promise of the oceans and why we should become more active in protecting them, all the while incorporating sustainable development of their resources."

of fisheries and other aquatic life. Climate change affects the economic, environmental, and food security of nations. Therefore multilateral and bilateral cooperation should be enhanced to reduce the negative effects of climate change."

- Developing an action plan to identify environmental problems and their root causes, propose remediation actions, and suggest plan implementation responsibility. "Given the urgent and imperative need to fully implement the above recommendations, a concrete action plan should be developed to elaborate problems and root causes, and to propose specific actions by ACOPS and to recommend appropriate organisations and parties to bear responsibility for the implementation of the measures. Such an action plan could be presented to the ACOPS/GLOBE Conference (Stockholm, January 1998) and could be adopted at its ministerial segment. The conference will inaugurate the 1998 International Year of the Oceans."

- Submitting the *Potomac Declaration*, through the host country, to the UN Special Assembly.


The declaration also recommends that policies and actions affecting the marine environment should be made compatible with sustainable development. It also points out that scientific research should be directed more toward understanding marine ecosystems and greater measurement of basic parameters through *in-situ* and satellite monitoring, and that international cooperation in protecting and sustainable use of the marine environment be expanded through the framework of the UNCLOS. The document also calls for putting data gathering systems—such as global ocean observing systems—in place to enhance wise decision-making in coastal zones.

Security: A Global Concern


The high level of international participation established that ocean security is an issue of global concern and is not limited to only a few coastal states. As a result, the declaration sets a high standard for the future of ocean security. It remains to be seen whether the optimism fostered by the conference in reaching and maintaining this standard will translate into effective political, social, and scientific action. The conference was, however, effective in promoting international communication by providing a forum for the discussion of problems affecting the marine environment and the exchange of ideas on how best to solve these problems.

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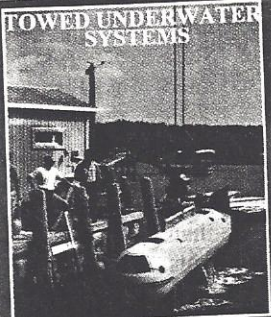
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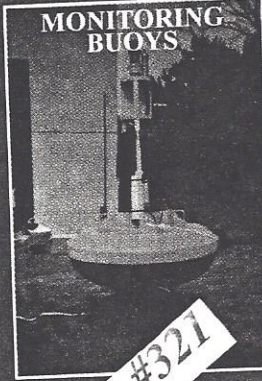
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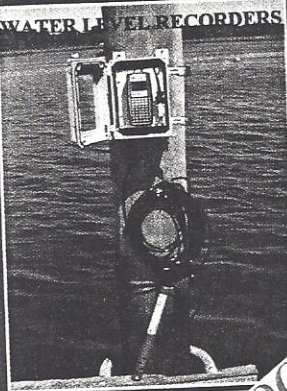
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Perhaps most importantly, it focused national and international political attention on coastal and marine environmental issues and highlighted the need for immediate cooperative efforts to address these issues. This raising of environmental consciousness in political minds across the globe may prove to be the most valuable outcome.

However, as one observer pointed out to *Sea Technology*, a big "loser" in conference makeup and determinations was science and technology. He noted that "S&T could be a valuable international tool" in the sticky process of ocean resource development and protection. In the United States, we discovered, the State Department apparently has discounted S&T for its own reasons.

Highlight of the meeting was the surprising combination of Gore and Gingrich addressing a community where just attention from more than one congressman at a time warrants headlines. During a packed Tuesday luncheon at the prestigious U.S. Capitol Hill Club (a Republican stronghold), Gingrich challenged the international ocean community to build a worldwide ocean database, activate an International Biodiversity Year, and

develop some cost-benefit analyses of what we are doing in the environment. Most of all, he said, "do a better job of informing—and convincing—legislators about what's really needed to better understand and use the oceans."

The message seemed to come across loud and clear. Gingrich warned the attendees "don't be practical, that's our [Congress] job." In other words, come up with a real plan and Congress will fund it.

Gore's speech that evening to an even larger gathering in the U.S. Capitol's Hall of Statuary was presented to "a group that shares my strong interest in the oceans." He quoted the logic of Ambrose Bierce who said "the ocean: a body of water occupying of a world made for man—who has no gills." Gore added that the oceans are absolutely essential for human existence on the earth, and today's society is dependent upon them in ways that are often little understood or appreciated.

He told the crowd of dignitaries as we look at the oceans today, we face three basic realities: first, the world's population is more dependent on them than ever before. Second, we are witnessing the beginnings of a profound degradation of the marine environment brought on by that dependence. Last, we dealing with a resource that we still do not fully understand.

"Our challenge for the 21st century must be to redefine our relationship with the oceans—to be the next generation of explorers that find new ways of learning about and living with the oceans without destroying long-term productivity," he noted.

Gore touched on his activities in releasing secret oceanographic data collected during the Cold War by both the Soviets and the U.S. Navy. He said our partnership with Russia on the Arctic Atlas is a triumph not only for openness but for international cooperation as we seek better ways of working together to understand and protect the world's oceans.

Another excellent model of international cooperation on a more global scale is our work on the international Coral Reef Initiative. Started in 1994 by the United States and six other governments, the initiative has evolved into a partnership involving more than 70 countries working together and with scientists, environmental groups, tourism operators, and others to better conserve, manage, and monitor coral reefs. /st/

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