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NOAA ORGANIC ACT SENT TO CONGRESS

The Bush Administration has sent a bill to Congress that codifies the establishment and purposes of NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Announcement of the action was made Tuesday at the inaugural meeting of the Cabinet-level Committee on Ocean Policy. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez, a member of the committee, said, "The transmittal of the NOAA Organic Act to Congress demonstrates the Administration's continuing support for timely passage of this bill. I look forward to working with our friends in Congress on this important measure."

The bill was originally introduced last year as part of the Administration's response to the report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy that recommended putting a NOAA Organic Act into law.

"NOAA needs an all encompassing charter to continue its important work," said retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "As the nation's primary ocean agency, NOAA science and service significantly contributes to a healthy economy, supports important atmospheric and ocean research and works to ensure sound stewardship of our oceans, coastal and Great Lakes resources."

NOAA was formed by executive order in 1970. Created as part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA has never had a statutory basis for its existence or to conduct its activities and missions. Instead, NOAA has operated under 200 different authorizations.

In its report, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy stated that a NOAA Organic Act would strengthen the agency and would help to ensure that its structure is consistent with its primary functions of management, prediction, research and education. The report said the Act would help NOAA achieve better management of oceans and coasts through an ecosystem-based approach.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through research to better understand atmospheric and climate variability and to manage wisely our nation's coastal and marine resources.