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March 26, 2013

Rep. Jules Bailey
Rep. Deborah Boone
Rep. Mark Johnson
Committee on Energy & Environment
900 Court Street NE, HR D
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chairman Bailey, Vice-Chairs Boone and Johnson, Committee members:

Oregon is the only state in the US that does not provide state support for federally financed ocean research vessels that operate out of its ports. Lack of state support puts these vessels at risk because their research days are limited. If operating funds become restricted, these vessels are more likely to be dry-docked, resulting in significant losses to local economies.

HB 3451 establishes a comprehensive Ocean Research Vessel Program that provides \$330,000 in state funding that would enable ten days of vessel research for the 2013-15 bienniums. A panel of scientists and public members would recommend a research program for the vessel. Funding would be contingent upon federal commitments to support the operations and maintenance of the current research vessel *Oceanus* or its replacement.

Support for an ocean research vessel is particularly important now because the National Science Foundation recently awarded Oregon State University a \$3 million grant to design a new ocean research vessel. This work is expected to grow to a total of \$290 million over the next ten years. Once constructed, this vessel would replace the *Oceanus*, which currently operates out of the Port of Newport. Oregon risks losing the *Oceanus* or its successor if other states provide greater assurances of active deployment due to the support they commit to vessel operations.

- The research vessel *Oceanus*, which operates out of Newport, annually expends approximately \$3.6 million in the local area for fuel, crew support, and other operations.
- HB 3451 would ensure a continuation of these economic benefits—a return on investment of over 10 to 1.


The Port of Newport, as the homeport to the NOAA MOC-P fleet, understands that ocean research vessels enable scientists to observe the linkages between the offshore California current and Oregon's territorial sea. The data gathered by offshore research provides better understanding of the short-term and long-term changes in ecosystem structure and how these changes relate to both human activities and natural variability. Oregon relies on a large, research-class ship based in its coastal waters to gather the information it needs to develop effective marine and coastal policies related to fisheries, offshore energy, tourism, and conservation.

In addition to the funding that this proposal provides, HB 3451 would create a research council consisting of scientists and public members who would evaluate and rank proposals for use of the research vessel. Decisions will ultimately be made by Oregon State University, which operates the research vessel under contract with the National Science Foundation. The council would assure that:

- Proposals for vessel days would be solicited from state agencies, as well as from students and faculty at all of Oregon's public universities;
- vessel days would be available to any state agency or OUS institution and will be scheduled as part of the federal ship scheduling process; and that
- OSU will submit yearly reports to the Legislature regarding the research conducted by the vessel.

The Port of Newport Board of Commissioners asks for your support in moving this request forward with a Do Pass recommendation.

Thank you,



JoAnn Barton, President
Port of Newport Board of Commissioners