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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3701

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February 28, 2013

Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Dr. Lubchenco:

We write today to express our concerns with a recent announcement regarding the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) management of weather buoys off the Mouth of the Columbia River (MCR).

As you may be aware, NOAA operates three buoys near the MCR that provide vital data collection capabilities to accurately monitor weather and ocean conditions off the Oregon coast. As agencies across the federal government adjust to new budget realities, NOAA has announced that one of the buoys--Buoy 46089--will not be repaired or replaced upon its failure. Although we understand the fiscal challenges facing NOAA, we are concerned with the impact this decision might have on the safety of our mariners and the economy of our region.

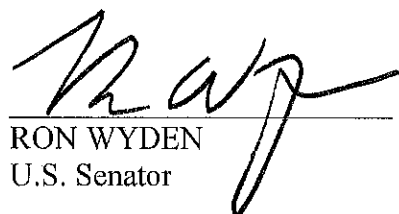
Throughout the last decade, the federal government and regional partners have worked tirelessly to provide accurate weather forecasting to the coastal community, not just in Oregon but nationwide. Buoy 46089 is a critical component in this effort. The buoy lies 85 miles offshore and can provide approximately 5 hours' notice of approaching storms. Prior to the winter of 2012, Buoy 46005 provided mariners on the coast with up to 19 hours' notice, but that buoy ceased transmitting in July 2012 and is not scheduled for repairs. The data collected at these buoys helps to accurately predict when storms will hit the dangerous Columbia River Bar and, in turn, helps maintain the safety of mariners and protect industries along the Oregon Coast and on the Columbia-Snake River System.

As our nation slowly works toward economic recovery, it is vital that our trade lanes remain open and operate efficiently. The Columbia-Snake River System is a significant export gateway, and as part of the Administration's National Export Initiative, our constituents are working hard to increase exports from the region. Without the data collected by Buoy 46089, uncertainty in the coastal community could have significant negative impacts on commerce in our region. Ship delays cost between \$10,000 and \$70,000 a day, train delays up to \$11,000 each day, and added congestion to rail lines and export terminals could amount to an additional \$20,000 per day per terminal. If a vessel runs aground as it crosses the Bar, there is also the potential for environmental harm, which could dramatically impact coastal economies like fishing, recreation, and shellfish aquaculture.

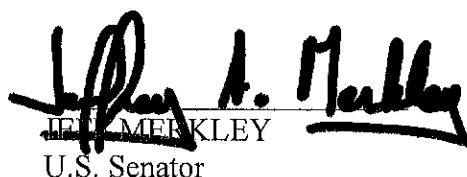
The cost to repair the buoy is estimated to be between \$40,000 and \$60,000. As we look for potential savings across the federal government, it is important to pursue options that make economic sense. When comparing the price of repairing the buoy with the twenty billion dollars in cargo that crosses the Columbia River Bar annually, it is clear that repairing the buoy is a cost-effective investment for NOAA to make in our river system and our economy.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to your prompt response on this matter.


Sincerely,



RON WYDEN
U.S. Senator



JEFF MERKLEY
U.S. Senator



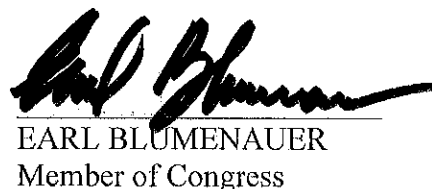
SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress



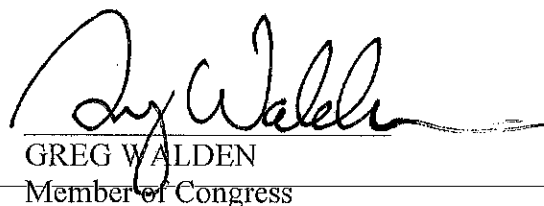
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