

MARINE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING #1

November 21, 2013, Olympia, WA

Opening remarks by the Chair – *Martha Kongsgaard, council chair*

Welcome everyone to the inaugural meeting of the Marine Resource Advisory Council which is, as you know, a creature of the 2013 legislative session. Parenthetically, I'm certain Senator Ranker did his best, but *MRAC* does not roll easily off the tongue. Strangely, however, if you Google it, you will find at least 30 pages of groups living with it; I'm not sure if they were bragging or complaining but we are in august company: Marietta-Roswell Alumnae Chapter (I'm not sure of what?); The Moab Recreation and Aquatics center; The Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council and it's a girls' cross country conference in central Missouri; La Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale; And a really, really bad techno band from the UK called MRAC! which I will spare you.

But seriously, I want to thank you for agreeing to join in this work - for agreeing to yet another council – and as demonstrated by the sheer act of your arrival, for having enough of a stake in this emerging, some would say fully emerged, potentially life threatening, and surely life altering issue of ocean acidification, to join on. This is not just a danger but, coupled with its twin, climate disruption, thee dangers in a world littered with immense challenges. It is a singular danger for those of us around this table whose ancient way of life, many multi-generational livelihoods, cultures, and creatures – the entire web of life, the system – are at high risk – now, today, and actually since yesterday! Dr. Feeley has been shouting about this for many years – we are here to lend you our voices, Dick – help is on the way!

Thank you for being here to help us to set the stage, to turn the lights on, to dig deep for honest answers to uncomfortable questions, to demand bench marks be met and traction be made, with a prejudice for action, trying things, on the ground in that cove there, with those atypical partners over here, to insist on a raised ambition around solutions and an impatience with incrementalism while we find ways to implement the findings of the OA panel as our work plan.

The action on OA -as many of you know and might think ironic- is happening at the state level. Washington State is in the vanguard, both because it is hitting us here first and most prominently, and because we have the scientific expertise to have sounded the alarm. I was appointed chair of this council by the first political chief executive in American history to be elected principally on a platform of combatting climate disruption. American democracy has a remarkable way of finding the leaders the times require it seems. And For the foreseeable future, this issue will be led from the grassroots – the states and cities – instead of from Washington D.C. While some leaders in DC seem removed from this pressing issue, Governor Inslee sees an existential threat that transcends politics. A sour ocean as you might imagine is agnostic as to who ignores it or who attempts to tackle it. And that “transcendent” place is the space in which this council needs to toil and where it will accomplish its best, most credible work.

Like our antecedent – the Blue Ribbon Panel on Ocean Acidification – we need to create a shared mutual safe mental space to think big, to appreciate the on the ground realities that are driving this now as well as the long term implications of a souring sea. Let's never forget why we are here – what has driven the group of us here. Let's make sure that ‘the why’ is what animates us

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in our quest to implement the hows, and the whats, and the whens all of which will be hammered out, negotiated, and hopefully reached through consensus.

We as you well know are an advisory council – effectively, we have no money, no regulatory power, little staff (and today no food or water!) that could be right out of the shoot deflating. But I choose to think that this unencumbered framework, with these people around this table – not your surrogates, but you all intentionally invited, you all who have reason to be worried about this existential threat – that we can give ourselves the freedom of saying the truth loudly, and together. That is where our power lies.

This group has to be able to hold both the enormous global aspect of this challenge without falling into despair or pessimism while firmly believing in what a friend of mine described as the profound indigenous land ethic, the passionate and scientifically advanced environmental brain trust and the optimistic entrepreneurial depth of this region of the country - the eastern shore of the Pacific and the Salish Sea. If we as a region can't raise our ambition enough, set our sights high enough, or believe in our ability to plow through urgently these pressing issues by telling our story, and marshaling our technical expertise, never mind us, for our grandchildren, it will be a great larceny .

We are going to have to work to adapt when we don't have the past to use as a guide for the future. We as a group are going to have to try to understand what the big picture is, where the large levers are, where the game changers lie, where the tipping points are, what science we need, and how much science is enough to risk getting on the ground and innovating, experimenting out ahead to save the things people love. We'll need to be scrupulous about the state of the science and data we present and use as our basis for action. We will need to insist on integration of OA as an issue into the larger ecosystem management and monitoring and research schemes. We'll need to insist on synergy and alignment in all of our investments, public and private. There isn't going to be enough money in the long haul for siloed work.

And we are going to have to figure out how to organize the ship of state to support the local work at the local level while keeping the big picture first and foremost, out into an unknowable future, understanding that democracy cannot be a vicarious experience – its communal – that that's how this work will get done – across opinions, across parties, across communities, industries and governments. We will need to be great champions for the Academy, the OA center at UW, for the deep partnership and expertise of our federal and state brothers and sisters, and for the research and leadership at WSU, Western, and even OSU where tremendous work is being done on this issue.

In all of this, we will have to understand how we think about “recovery” in a world where the population is growing but the geography isn't and then manage out another 20 years and another 20 and on, out 7 generations. How will the Mobius strip of science and policy help us understand our choices as we grapple with our need to conform the economy to the limits of nature? To this we add the twin peril devilishly linked to population growth: climate change.

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And we have to ask ourselves: Is it folly to labor to restore habitat, take down dams, protect eel grass beds, restore herring, and manage stormwater with hundreds of millions of dollars of tax payer money while the other climate impact, ocean acidification, inexorably barrels down at us. We need to ultimately integrate OA into all of our consequential decision making processes going forward. Can we possibly understand the whole system in all its complexities and make the best choices? But choices for whom, on what time frame, and in what context? Is the system too big to fail? Think Wall Street and think again. This may be a cliff, as a friend of mine is wont to say, that we won't be able to talk Mother Nature off of if we don't communicate across disciplines, sectors, citizenry, and state and international borders and muster a response commensurate with the challenge. In the debate between transition v. transformation as KC Golden, the great climate solution guru says, we have no time for the former and hopefully it is not too late for the latter. I know the Governor believes this.

Finally, we are here today to get the lay of the land- to reach a common understanding of how we got here politically and what the science is telling us, what our friends are experiencing. And to express an urgency. I have talked to most of you prior to this meeting. And as I said in the beginning, we'll have to manage the enormity of this issue. There are a lot of weeds we could get caught in. There is no shortage of inertia and despair that comes with the global nature of much of this, the inevitability and pressing nature of it all. But to throw out a double negative: we can't do nothing. Having the results of the Blue Ribbon Panel sit on a shelf with no follow up would be unacceptable. We are the follow up, the champions of that work.

So let me finally thank you all. Thank JT Austin from the governor's office who is with us today;

To the UW and CIG for "loaning" us Lara Whitley-Binder, our tether to the Blue Ribbon Panel who so expertly and graciously got us all to this point and the incomparable Hedia Adelsman whose well known policy/political/science savvy certainly got us to this day as well. And to DNR – for the funds to hire a top flight team to facilitate us and their willingness to go this journey with us, as demonstrated sharply today by the presence of the Commissioner himself.

Yes, there is a lot of uncertainty – let's all admit we are all flying half blind into an unknowable future. We will need to have hard conversations, to admit what we don't know and to treat this like a campaign we believe in, with front loaded energy, aiming at tangible but ambitious goals. To paraphrase Denis Hayes, pessimism has little or no survival value in a Darwinian sense. One can't get work done in fetal position.

Let's do this work in the public's interest, the economy's interest, the planet's interest, which I think in the end is in our interest.

-- *Martha Kongsgaard, Marine Resource Advisory Council, Chair*