

GAO critical of interagency response to ocean acidification

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In an October 14 report, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended the formation of an independent office to streamline the federal response to ocean acidification. Currently, research into ecological, social, and economic effects of changing ocean chemistry is directed by an interagency task force led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and vice-chaired by representatives from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

As atmospheric carbon dioxide levels increase, oceans absorb an estimated 30 to 50 percent of annual gas emissions. This absorption makes oceans more acidic, which has adverse effects on species that produce carbonate shells, including plankton, corals, and bivalves. The proposed office would coordinate domestic and international research and ocean monitoring efforts as well as facilitating the exchange of relevant information.

After review of the interagency coalition's strategic plan, the GAO found that the plan lacked coordination between task force members, specific mitigation and adaptation strategies, and budget requirement estimates. The GAO report suggests that a dedicated ocean acidification office would help accomplish the plan's goals: better monitoring of ocean chemistry and further research on the carbon cycle and the ecological and social impacts of ocean acidification.

Sources: E&E News, Government Accountability Office, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory, *Science*

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