

**Comments on the NOAA Research Review Team Draft Report
Submitted by Ray Ban, Chair
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and

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On behalf of the Weather Coalition (http://www.ucar.edu/oga/wx_coalition/), a group of 30 corporations, professional associations, and academic institutions working to improve the nation's weather prediction and warning capabilities, I would like to submit the following comments on the Draft Preliminary Report of the NOAA Research Review Team that was issued on December 18, 2003.

Overview Comments

We thank the NOAA Research Review Team for the time and effort they are expending on behalf of the community. We understand the difficulty of the task assigned the Review Team, the time constraints under which the Team was working, and the need to focus, at this early stage of work, exclusively on internal NOAA programs and issues. While we applaud the work accomplished with this initial report, we urge the Team, for the next, more detailed iteration, to fully recognize the research partnerships that represent such a critical component of NOAA research. These partnerships, implemented with the private sector, research universities, and other laboratories such as the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), give NOAA researchers access to expertise through extramural grants programs, joint institutes, and cooperative agreements. The interactions benefit the country by producing the best possible scientific results and making possible the more rapid transfer of applications to operational mode than would otherwise be realized.

The members of the Weather Coalition encourage the Review Team to interview many of NOAA's external partners and to consider how to *strengthen and enhance* these relationships through recommendations to be made in the final report to be delivered to the Science Advisory Board on or before May 1, 2004. Through such recommendations, U.S. citizens will be served well by the inclusion of the best research minds the country has to offer, both internal and external to NOAA, in the accomplishment of NOAA research goals.

We recommend that, in the next iteration of the report, the Team make the crucial distinction between exploratory and applied research as details emerge concerning the structure and direction of NOAA activities. In order to maintain and increase the vitality

and value of the NOAA research function, both exploratory and applied research must be retained and valued.

Specific Comments

Page 7 – Organizational Principles for Guiding Research Location and Management. These principles and the resultant organizational recommendation regarding the management structure (Page 8. Research Organization Within NOAA) have the potential to give needed structure and increased coordination to the currently confusing and seemingly disjointed research programs of NOAA. This will help to focus NOAA research and prioritize programs for which there are limited resources. But we urge the Team to give thought to the manner in which NOAA research and technology transfer goals are established and to reflect a new structure for framing these goals in the next iteration of the report. Currently, we are concerned that many goals are set by the agency in a way that results in “job shopping” and scientific accomplishments geared to short term needs. Future recommendations should allow for goals to be set with the participation of the broad scientific community and with consideration for the long-term approach that is absolutely necessary given scientific research methods and the complexity of scientific problems.

Page 7. Strategic Plan and NOAA’s Research Mission. We agree that the current lack of an overall research strategic plan for NOAA creates problems both internal and external to NOAA and we enthusiastically endorse the recommendation to create a strategic plan for all NOAA research that extends out to 20 years. We recommend that this plan be updated every two-to-five years to enable NOAA be responsive to opportunities and to stay current with changing national needs. This process should include extensive and thorough interactions with industry and academic partners.

Page 9. Research Organization Within OAR. The members of the Weather Coalition are concerned that the Review Team recommends OAR laboratory consolidation without having made laboratory visits to date and without having interviewed key people internal and external to NOAA who could provide extremely useful information that would assist the Team with making such a critical decision. We urge the Team to do the extensive investigations warranted in order to make an informed decision about the structure, number, and foci of OAR labs. As we are sure the members of the Team realize, consolidation will affect the lives of NOAA employees and the science that is accomplished. Justification for consolidation would need to be well thought out as would recommendations for implementation in order to accomplish the strengthening of the OAR structure without seriously hurting morale and jeopardizing the jobs and work of the best OAR researchers.

Given the complexity of the consolidation task and the ambitious timeline for the completion of the Team’s work, we recommend that the Review Team consider providing NOAA a *framework* consisting of criteria and process that could be consulted and implemented when serious work is to be done on the lab consolidation issue. The National Academies has just completed a report on major research facilities that might

offer some useful lessons as a guide in creating such a framework. An overview of *Setting Priorities for Large Facility Projects Sponsored by the National Science Foundation* may be found at: http://www7.nationalacademies.org/nsf-priorities/Report_Release-Briefing_Charts-14-Jan-2004.pdf and the full report may be viewed at: <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/10895.html>.

As we are sure the Review Team is aware, the OAR labs collaborate extensively with NOAA's joint and cooperative institutes. Within the draft report, there are no findings that are relevant to these institutes; we urge the Team to include visits to these important facilities as their work progresses. These institutes are extremely important in the access they give NOAA researchers to collaborative work with experts external to NOAA. Any plan to enhance the health of NOAA research overall needs to acknowledge their critical role. We cannot overemphasize this point and, at the risk of repeating ourselves, again encourage the Team to visit as many of the institutes as is humanly possible in order to get the full story about the complex set of external relationships that occur through these cooperative relationships and that extend far into the scientific community. The results produce incredible value for the nation such as the Weather Event Simulator that was awarded a Department of Commerce Gold Medal last fall.

We appreciate both the excellent work of the Review Team and the opportunity to provide comment on the Team's significant draft report.