

satisfy NOAA's obligations to address or revise existing salmonid biological opinions pursuant to Federal court orders.

The Committee rejects the proposal to close NOAA's James J. Howard Laboratory and instead provides sufficient funding to operate the laboratory in fiscal year 2013. Furthermore, the Committee does not support the administration's proposal to cease current operations at NOAA's Oxford Laboratory. The Committee is not opposed to the transition of the Oxford Lab from NOS to NMFS, but directs NOAA to maintain current operations and research at the facility as well as continue existing intergovernmental and academic partnerships. The Committee also rejects the administration's proposal to reduce current operational funding for the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office which included the termination of the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System and instead provides sufficient funding to maintain existing operations. NOAA shall provide the Committee with a revised transition plan for the Oxford Lab with the 2013 spending plan that shall include organizational efficiencies and collaborations with the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office.

The fiscal year 2013 budget request demonstrates that the administration is obviously experiencing financial difficulties maintaining NOAA's northeast fishery facilities, with small local laboratories in the Mid-Atlantic area receiving a disproportionately larger reduction and elimination. Coastal States find value in local NOAA facilities which have built direct partnerships with the commercial fishing industry and regional external partners to conduct a range of work needed to accomplish NOAA's mission.

Therefore, in order to better balance NOAA's fiscal needs with that of the best local fishery results, NOAA is directed to close the Northeast Regional Office [NERO] and consolidate the entire regional operations and management within NMFS headquarters. This regional office serves the eastern seaboard from Maine to North Carolina, and as far west as Minnesota. Better centrally locating the facility at NMFS headquarters would allow for greater coordination with senior management at NOAA and the Department, while saving an estimated \$1,800,000 on rent and a yet unspecified amount on travel costs. The Committee believes this consolidation will provide for efficiencies and enhance management, while still maintaining a strong regional presence.

From the Committee's perspective, some activities at NERO can be conducted at other NOAA facilities without using leased space and incurring the associated lease costs. Since the lease at this facility will expire in September 2013, its termination will save costs now and in the future. Such rationale should be acceptable to NOAA because similar language on not renewing a lease was used by the agency on page 150 of NOAA's fiscal year 2013 Congressional Budget Justification to justify the closure of the James J. Howard Laboratory. However, unlike the circumstances with James J. Howard Laboratory, this closure will actually result in real cost savings to the agency in 2013, not just in out-years. Upon closing NERO, NOAA may continue to support a small local presence in the area.

Survey and Monitoring.—The Committee is concerned that a new stock assessment on Gulf of Maine cod indicates that the stock may