

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS**  
**STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA**  
**Budget Committee**  
March 28, 2007

**SUBJECT:** Acquisition/construction of a Statewide Coastal Ocean Research Vessel for the Florida Institute of Oceanography

---

**PROPOSED BOARD ACTION**

Direct the Florida Institute of Oceanography (FIO) to update its long-term financial plan to ensure the continuing sustainability of the FIO. The plan is to be reviewed and adopted by the FIO Advisory Board. In particular, the current rate structure should be reformulated so that, upon completion of the new vessel, rates should be established to provide for a long-term maintenance reserve over the expected useful life of the equipment.

Amend the 2007-2008 Legislative Budget Request to include funding in an amount not to exceed \$1,500,000 for the purpose of financing the plan and design of a replacement for the Research Vessel Suncoaster for the Florida Institute of Oceanography. This amount represents 10 percent of the estimated cost of this project.

**AUTHORITY FOR BOARD OF GOVERNORS ACTION**

Article IX, Section 7(d), Florida Constitution.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Florida Institute of Oceanography (FIO) was established in 1970 to provide the necessary infrastructure to survey and support Florida's coastal marine science and oceanography programs in education, training, research, public outreach and marine resource management. This centralized approach minimizes expenses by avoiding duplication of research and facilities infrastructure. The FIO is based at the St. Petersburg Campus of the University of South Florida and co-located with the Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI). Collectively, the FIO consortium generated \$15 million in outside grants and contracts in the last five years. The Research Vessel Suncoaster is the primary ocean platform for grant and contract research programs involving member institutions. The Suncoaster is a 40-year old "drug boat" that was acquired and renovated by the FIO in 1980. The vessel has become increasingly unsustainable in this supporting role because of its hull limitations, lack of scientific storage space, lack of laboratory spaces and a limited number of scientist accommodations. The Suncoaster lacks the capacity for modern multi-disciplinary oceanographic science and technologies.

The FIO is seeking funding for a replacement for the Suncoaster. The request appears reasonable and critical to continue the work of the FIO. Without a replacement vessel, maintaining and operating the RV Suncoaster in a safe and efficient manner will be challenging in the long run. Since the ship is 40 years old and the average useful life is 20-30 years, if the work of the FIO supported by the current vessel is to continue, a replacement rather than a major overhaul is warranted.

As indicated, the FIO is an essential component of the marine research capability of several entities besides the State University System, including the Florida Marine Research Institute, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of State, Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Mote Marine Lab. Two are of particular note: the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the SRI-St. Petersburg Marine Research Facility.

The Florida Oceans and Coastal Resources Council (OCRC) promotes innovative research and supports the enhancements of Florida's academic and marine research institutions into an integrated network of partnerships. The Governor has included \$8,095,151 in his 2007-2008 budget for the DEP/OCRC. If this budget is approved by the Legislature, the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observing Systems (COOS) will be planned and developed. The COOS is a mix of in-water platforms and buoys, shipboard surveys and remote sensors which will provide for the required continuous monitoring of water quality and status of marine resources. This interdisciplinary observing system will span from the outer shelf to coastal estuaries and rivers and will be administered and supported by the FIO. If a new vessel is constructed, it would be equipped with sensors to be a functional part of the system, so that every time the ship is at sea, it is gathering data. However, if no new vessel is built, the feasibility of fitting the existing vessel with these sensors is questionable.

Likewise, the SRI received a \$20 million dollar Innovation Incentive Grant to accelerate research and development of technologies related to ocean science, the maritime industry and port security. The SRI just commenced operations in January 2007, but the FIO anticipates SRI could use existing ship capacity within the next few years.

---

**Supporting Documentation Included:**

1. Florida Institute of Oceanography Business Plan 2007
2. Florida Oceans & Coastal Resources Council Brochure
3. Florida Coastal Ocean Observing System Flyer

**Facilitators/Presenters:**

Mr. Chris Kinsley, Director of Finance & Facilities  
Dr. John Ogden, Director of Florida Institute of  
Oceanography