



May 8, 2025

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Elvira Salazar
2162 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

GRETCHEN WHITMER
CHAIR
Governor of Michigan

MIKE DEWINE
VICE CHAIR
Governor of Ohio

JB PRITZKER
Governor of Illinois

MIKE BRAUN
Governor of Indiana

TIM WALZ
Governor of Minnesota

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor of New York

JOSH SHAPIRO
Governor of Pennsylvania

TONY EVERS
Governor of Wisconsin

DAVID NAFTZGER
Executive Director

Dear Senators and Representatives:

Thank you for your recent introduction of the Ocean Regional Opportunity and Innovation Act (Ocean ROI Act). The Act has the potential to help boost our efforts to harness our region's waters to create good, lasting jobs and investment opportunities across the eight Great Lakes States. We appreciate your shared leadership toward these goals.

Over a period of many years, Administrations have sought to improve policy and intergovernmental coordination for management of the nation's ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources through initiatives including the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, National Ocean Policy, National Ocean Council and related initiatives. During this time Great Lakes restoration and protection efforts have been led and facilitated by the Council of Great Lakes Governors (CGLG). For example, CGLG developed nine priorities for Great Lakes restoration and protection in 2003 that in turn served as the basis for the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration followed by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. In recognition of this role and at the request of the Great Lakes Governors, in 2010 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration designated CGLG as the Regional Ocean Partnership for the Great Lakes.¹

The path to robust, vibrant, resilient coastal economies runs through our waters. Modernized fisheries; innovative ship and boatbuilding practices; vessel electrification; development of marine biotechnology and biopharmaceuticals; and, Great Lakes data collection and monitoring are just a few examples of the tremendous opportunities that await coastal communities as they shape sustainable economic futures. Now is the time for the federal government to make a strategic investment in our nation's blue economy by supporting the establishment and expansion of regional ocean and Great Lakes innovation clusters that can keep pace with [similar investments already being made in other countries](#) around the world.² There is also a need to develop and educate the workforce critical to the blue economy.

¹ See [Federal Register :: NOAA Regional Ocean Partnership Funding Program-FY2011 Funding Competition](#)

² See: "Blue Tech Clusters in the Northern Arc of the Atlantic," The Ocean Foundation, June 2022. Available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/da20701b27734791a5a3809ade24adc2>

The Ocean ROI Act is a positive step forward that emphasizes the importance of government support for the blue economy. We thank you once again for recognizing this emerging sector as fundamental to our nation's international competitiveness and integral to our efforts to ensure healthy Great Lakes, oceans and coasts for all Americans. We look forward to working with you on this important issue which can help to deliver needed funding to help protect and restore our Great Lakes and advance economic opportunities in our region.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Naftzger". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end.

David Naftzger
Executive Director