

# The changing tides of government

Jane Lubchenco, head of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, discusses her roller-coaster time in Washington DC.

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Marine ecologist Jane Lubchenco has spent almost four years at the helm of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and has seen her share of ups and downs. She talks to *Nature* about accomplishments and disappointments.

## How do you feel about your tenure?

I'm really pleased with a number of things that we've been able to do. I would highlight our scientific-integrity policy, which says that NOAA is not allowed to suppress, distort or change the science, and that scientists are free to speak to the media about their findings. A second major achievement is doubling the number of senior scientific positions at NOAA. We have also re-established the chief-scientist position at NOAA and empowered scientists to participate actively in defining their research agenda. We are really shining a spotlight on how important science is in this agency, and creating the conditions for science and scientists to thrive and do what the nation needs them to do.

## In 2010, President Barack Obama nominated marine geochemist Scott Doney to be NOAA's first chief scientist in more than a decade. The nomination stalled in the Senate; what is the status of that position now?

Congress passed legislation about two months ago that says that the position no longer needs to be confirmed by the Senate. Once this legislation goes into effect, on 10 October, the president will be making his decision. So stay tuned.

## You weren't able to get a proposal to establish a Climate Service through Congress. Are you able to move forward independently?

We are supposed to provide climate services by congressional direction, and have been doing that for some time. We put forward a proposal to reorganize the different parts of NOAA that need to be integrated to provide those climate services, which was not approved by Congress. It was disappointing that we were not able to become more effective, but so be it. We will continue to provide climate services.

## Are these services in demand?

Whether it is planning by businesses, communities, emergency managers or the US military, all are depending on the information we are providing. There are more calls for this, and hopefully we'll be able to become more efficient at providing these services over time.

## In 2010, you advanced a policy for stewardship of oceans, coasts and the Great Lakes, but aspects of that plan, including the regional-planning component, have run into opposition. Why do you think that is?

We have made huge progress. Simply creating the National Ocean Policy was a major step forward. Anything new often takes a while to be appreciated for its potential, and I think that is what we are seeing with the National Ocean Policy. I think that for many of the areas where we have not been able to make as much progress as I had hoped, we are seeing increasing recognition of why it is important.

## Before you came to Washington DC, you were a marine biologist at Oregon State University in Corvallis. Has it been difficult adjusting?

Even though I came from the academic world, I had spent a lot of time in and around Washington DC before coming to NOAA, working with lots of federal agencies and quite a few members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, as well as doing a lot of congressional testimony. So I had a pretty good sense of the importance of working with multiple partners to achieve good outcomes for the nation.

And I believe strongly that science should not be dictating what happens, but it should certainly inform decisions that are being made, whether by Congress, businesses, agencies or individuals. This recognizes that values are important, that economics are important



Jane Lubchenco  
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and that politics are important.

**Do you plan to stick around if given the opportunity?**

I am fully committed to this president and his vision for our country. I think that what we have achieved is amazing, and the country is only beginning to appreciate all of the wonderful things that have happened. I think there is a lot left to do, and I want to do everything I can to make that happen.

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