

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this bill is to reauthorize and amend the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act, and for other purposes.

The Hydrographic Services Improvement Act (HSIA) was first enacted in 1998 and amended in 2002. The HSIA authorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Administrator to fulfill the hydrographic data gathering and dissemination duties of the Administration required to ensure safe navigation for the Nation. In addition, the HSIA provides the NOAA Administrator the authority to

- promulgate standards for hydrographic data,
- ensure comprehensive geographic coverage of hydrographic services,
- maintain a national database of hydrographic data,
- provide hydrographic services in uniform, easily accessible formats (i.e. nautical charts),
- enter into and award contracts for the acquisition of hydrographic data and services,
- procure, lease, evaluate, test, develop, and operate vessels, equipment, and technologies necessary to maintain operational expertise in hydrographic data acquisition and hydrographic services, and
- use hydrographic data to support the conservation and management of coastal and ocean resources.

These activities are important to ensuring the important commerce functions of the Nation's Marine Transportation System remain safe, efficient, and environmentally sound.

The programs and activities authorized by the HSIA also play an important role in the national response to natural and man-made disasters. For example, NOAA experts discovered the submerged wreckage of TWA Flight 800, took some of the first aerial images of Ground Zero after 9/11, and provided a substantial and vital response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including surveying affected waterways to facilitate the reopening of 13 major ports to commerce and relief efforts. Hydrographic and navigation services are linked to maritime technology development and transportation improvements. The oceanographic and geospatial information provided by NOAA's hydrographic data and services also supports habitat conservation and fishery management, as well as oil and hazardous spill responses. In addition to reauthorizing the underlying mission to support safe and efficient commerce, this bill clarifies the importance and facilitates the ability of NOAA to support these other diverse applications of NOAA's hydrographic data and services.