Understanding the role of science in current ocean and climate legislation in the State of Washington

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ABSTRACT
The IGERT Program on Ocean Change at the University of Washington is committed to training scholars to use integrative, cross-disciplinary, and cross-scale approaches to investigate problems of ocean change. Trainees learn how to address these problems from a coupled social-ecological perspective and communicate with diverse groups. Our diverse disciplinary research projects have indirect implications for society, but as trainees in the IGERT Program on Ocean Change, we are interested in how scientific findings are used by policy makers for the benefit of society. To learn how environmental science is used in the development of policy, we worked with Washington State policy makers as they developed draft legislation concerning ocean acidification and greenhouse gas emissions for Washington State. Going forward, we will serve as a resource for the Marine Resources Advisory Council and the Executive Work Group on Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

PHOTOGRAPHS

OCEAN CHANGE LEGISLATION IN WASHINGTON STATE

In November 2012 the recommendations set forth by the Washington State Blue Ribbon Panel on Ocean Acidification were presented to the Governor. This spring Senate Bill 5603 was passed by the Washington State Senate and House of Representatives. This bill establishes the Washington Marine Resources Advisory Council which will function to increase Washington State’s ability to address impacts of ocean acidification. As IGERT trainees we observed the progress of this bill as it moved through the legislative process. We will continue to learn how science is used in the policy process by observing the actions of the Washington Marine Resources Advisory Council and by responding to the science-based information needs of policy makers. Our goals are to learn first-hand about legislative and policy processes and to contribute to solutions that address the tough problems of ocean change.

CLIMATE LEGISLATION IN WASHINGTON STATE

Washington State greenhouse gas emission limits put into law in 2008 require a reduction in emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, 25% below 1990 levels by 2035, and 50% below 1990 levels by 2050. In 2011 Washington State total emissions were 101.1 million metric tons of CO2 equivalents, 8.2 million metric tons beyond 1990 levels. Emissions come from transportation (46%), electricity (20%), industrial sources (16%), residential and commercial buildings (9%), agriculture (6%), and waste (3%). Washington State has adopted a suite of policies to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions (http://www.ecy.wa.gov/climatechange/laws.html).

The State is interested in adopting additional policies to reduce emissions to target levels. To do so, independent consultants will investigate the success of other strategies being used in the Pacific Northwest, on the west coast, in nearby Canada, and elsewhere to evaluate which approaches will work best for Washington State.

PHOTOGRAPHS

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