

# Quarterdeck

Richard W. Spinrad, Editor

## *The Right Program at the Right Time: a NOPPportunity*

Look at the logs of Charles Darwin's travels aboard *H.M.S. Beagle*, or the charts, hand-drawn by the Pathfinder of the Seas, Matthew Fontaine Maury, or the technical reports from Charles Thomson's expeditions aboard *H.M.S. Challenger*, and you'll see the inklings of the National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP). These pioneers recognized that in order to understand the ocean, whether for purposes of national security or basic research, one must approach the subject with sensitivity to the integration of disciplines and methods. Darwin recognized the intimate connection between marine geology and speciation. Maury knew that his charts of winds and currents had some bearing on the distributions of whales, which he plotted for the world ocean. Thomson recognized that thorough knowledge of oceanic processes could not be attained without an aggressive campaign of observations and sampling, including physical, biological, chemical and geological investigations. That is exactly what NOPP is all about.

The first "P" in the NOPP acronym has a double meaning. When the U.S. Congress enacted the National Ocean Partnership Act, in 1996, they saw two opportunities for partnering: between government agencies as sponsors, and among academia, industry, government and non-governmental organizations as performers. As you read through the pages of this issue of *Oceanography* you will find that now, in its fourth year, NOPP has captured both senses of partnering.

Almost thirty years ago, a crusty dyed-in-the-wool physical oceanographer told me, in no uncertain terms, that he never expected to go to sea alongside a biological oceanographer. While his language was a bit less tactful than such, he basically expressed no need to partner with any other disciplines in the conduct of his field research. I noticed in the most recent listing of NOPP-supported projects, that this same oceanographer is now leading a project which includes a slew of biogeochemists . . . and they're all going to sea together! Was he mollified? No, just NOPPified!

The future of NOPP is still uncertain, but the vital signs are excellent. What started as an idea, reminiscent of the historic approach to oceanography, has evolved into a strong program, with over \$100 million of investment to date, and participation by some half dozen sponsors. From the views on their quarterdecks, Darwin, Maury and Thomson would most likely be proud.



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