

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 24, 2023

Ken Graham
Director
NOAA National Weather Service
1325 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Director Graham,

We write in strong opposition to the National Weather Service's (NWS) potential decommissioning of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather buoy 46015 ("buoy 15") off the coast of Port Orford, Oregon. We strongly urge NWS to reconsider this proposal and keep buoy 15 at its current location.

We understand that the National Data Buoy Center (NDBC), which is part of NOAA's NWS, intends to decommission 11 weather buoys in the United States as part of an apparent cost-cutting measure, and that buoy 15 is a candidate for decommissioning. Decommissioning buoy 15 would be a grave mistake.

Buoy 15 is an essential asset to the Port of Port Orford and people who live, work, enjoy, and do business along Oregon's South Coast. It covers a significant swath of the ocean, serving as the only NOAA weather buoy between Crescent City, California, to the south, and Newport, Oregon, to the north. Buoy 15 is strategically located at a critical point that often experiences strong and unpredictable weather patterns. Thanks to its location, buoy 15 has long been recognized as producing the most representative weather forecasts for Oregon's South Coast.

Let us be clear: decommissioning buoy 15 would present serious safety risks, threatening lives and livelihoods on the South Coast. Without buoy 15, NWS would produce models that would not be as accurate or timely. Fishermen and mariners have told us that buoy 15's weather and wave observations are essential for ensuring their safety.

Additionally, we understand that following damage to buoy 15 in the Fall of 2022, the buoy still has not been repaired nor redeployed to its location. We also understand that the buoy has been damaged by both weather and boats in the past, and that the NWS has had to repair the buoy on various occasions. If the NDBC is pointing to these repair costs as an apparent justification for decommissioning the buoy, we find this an indefensible way to save money.

While repairs may present cost challenges for the agency, we do not feel that these challenges justify decommissioning a buoy that is vital for safety along Oregon's South Coast. These types of federal safety investments are exactly the investments that Oregon taxpayers expect and deserve.

Based on these developments, we request prompt answers to the following questions:

- Is NOAA indeed facing funding challenges that, in its view, require the decommissioning of important weather buoys, including buoy 15, across the U.S.? If so, please explain the nature of these funding challenges.
- Are there available alternatives that would not require decommissioning of these buoys?
- How did NOAA come to its decision when identifying candidates for possible decommissioning?
- Why has NWS delayed the repair and redeployment of buoy 15 for the better part of a year?
- Local communities have identified buoy 15 as vital to public safety. Given this important role, does NOAA believe that removing the buoy would jeopardize the federal government's role in serving and protecting Americans' lives and livelihoods?
- Has NOAA fully analyzed the impacts of decommissioning buoy 15 on public safety? If so, please explain how the agency determined that removing the buoy would not contribute to an increased risk to the safety of the communities it serves.
- Has NOAA fully analyzed the impacts that decommissioning buoy 15 could have on local economies on Oregon's South Coast? If so, please explain why the decommissioning of this important infrastructure would not threaten the economic wellbeing of local, rural, coastal economies.

We want to ensure that NDBC, NWS, and NOAA are making these decisions with full context and information, and not making cost-cutting decisions based on reading spreadsheets in Washington, DC, or Silver Spring, Maryland.

We strongly urge you to maintain and repair buoy 15 and not decommission it, and we are ready and willing to work with NOAA to ensure the agency gets the funding it needs to maintain and repair essential buoys, including buoy 15. We thank you for your consideration and for your timely responses to our questions.

Sincerely,

Val Hoyle
Member of Congress

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator