



SEP 26 2007



The Honorable Joseph Biden, Jr.  
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510-6225

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Since the earliest days of the Republic, this Nation has been committed to the underlying tenets of freedom of the seas to guarantee the economic and national security of the United States and the freedom of our people. In fact, one of the earliest treaties signed by the United States by then Minister to France Thomas Jefferson, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Morocco, addressed the same concerns as we discuss today, the free flow of international commerce and the securing of navigational rights. Today, with one of the world's longest coastlines, some of its busiest ports, and the largest exclusive economic zone of any country, the United States has economic and environmental stewardship interests in the oceans that are second to none. These interests underscore the importance of U.S. accession to the Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Convention creates a comprehensive and balanced legal framework designed to protect ocean resources while preserving navigational rights. It affirms the exclusive U.S. right to manage fisheries and oil, gas and mineral resources out to 200 miles from shore, allows us to maximize our sovereign rights over the valuable resources of the continental shelf beyond 200 miles, guarantees the right to lay telecommunication cables and pipelines, protects and promotes access on the high seas and in coastal areas throughout the world for marine scientific research, and assures navigational rights for merchant vessels upon which the vast majority of our international trade depends.

The Departments of Commerce and the Interior, along with other federal agencies, work to manage our ocean resources and the commerce they support. The Department of Commerce, which is responsible for promoting our nation's economic development, expanding international trade and commerce, and protecting and understanding our oceans, and the Department of the Interior, which is responsible for managing outer continental shelf mineral and energy resources, believe it is imperative that the United States accede to the Convention on the Law of the Sea. Our two Departments work together to map coastal lands and the oceans and to manage and protect an integrated coastal ecosystem, and together, as stewards of our nation's oceans, coasts, and the continental shelf, we urge favorable Senate action on U.S. accession during this session of Congress.

Sincerely,

  
DIRK KEMPTHORNE  
Secretary of the Interior

  
CARLOS M. GUTIERREZ  
Secretary of Commerce