First Look: Commercial Engagement Through Ocean Technology Act of 2018 (S 2511, 115th Congress)

Directs the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration to coordinate and study the use of unmanned maritime systems.

WHAT IT DOES

S 2511, “Commercial Engagement Through Ocean Technology Act of 2018” (CENOTE Act of 2018) directs the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to coordinate and study the use of unmanned maritime systems (UMS) at NOAA. Specifically, the Administration’s offices of Atmospheric Research (OAR) and Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) will coordinate research, assessment, and acquisition of surface and underwater UMS at NOAA.

To facilitate this coordination, NOAA will convene a committee, titled the “Unmanned Maritime Systems Ocean Technology Coordinating Committee” (Coordinating Committee), with representatives from OAR and OMAO, as well as the Office of Ocean Exploration, Office of the Integrated Ocean Observing System, and other NOAA offices involved with UMS. Beyond offices within NOAA, the Coordinating Committee will also work with the Department of the Navy to share and leverage expertise in UMS research and operations.

Specifics of the Coordinating Committee’s collaboration with the Navy include:

- Assuring NOAA is informed and aligned with the Navy’s strategic, research, and operational priorities;
- Making Naval UMS testing and training facilities available to NOAA;
- Mutual provisions for best practices for UMS operations and training centers as well as UMS testing, research, and acquisitions;
- The consideration of shared UMS or provision of decommissioned UMS; and
- Collaboration and knowledge-sharing of topics relevant to UMS (e.g. oceanic mapping, bathymetry, and ocean exploration).

Also included in this bill are provisions granting the Coordinating Committee and Navy the authority to partner with other Federal agencies, private industries, and academic institutions interested in the research, development, workforce-training, commercialization, and acquisition of UMS.

This bill also directs NOAA, in partnership with the Coordinating Committee and partners, to conduct regular assessments of whether commercially available UMS could support the Administration’s missions based on UMS operational utility, cost-effectiveness, and reliability.

Within a year this bill’s passage and every four years thereafter, NOAA is also to submit a report of its activities related to this bill to Congress including NOAA’s current inventory of UMS, collected data, and resulting benefits. Specific committees of Congress to receive these reports will include:

- The Committee on Appropriations, the Committee on Armed Services, and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate; and
- The Committee on Appropriations, the Committee on Armed Services, the Committee on Natural Resources, and the Committee...
While this bill does not formally grant any explicit amount of funding to fulfill the obligations of this bill, NOAA is permitted to accept funding or in-kind services from partnering stakeholders as well as transfer funds to carry out this bill.

**RELEVANT SCIENCE**

According to the 2016 Roadmap for US Robotics, “From Internet to Robotics”, there are ever expanding applications of UMS to maintaining and improving national security, coastal and oceanic environmental monitoring, and resource acquisition. Similar to other forms of unmanned vehicles and systems, UMS is dependent upon improvements in sense and control as well as autonomous planning and decision making technologies to enable long-distance and duration applications (SciPol Science Modules available: Autonomous Planning and Decision Making, Sensors for Automated Vehicles).

**STATUS**

Bill S 2511 was first introduced in the Senate on March 7, 2018 and subsequently referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. On April 25, 2018, the bill was ordered to be reported with an amendment that was posted to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on July 9, 2018. The amended bill was placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar as No. 504 under General Orders.

**SPONSORS**

Sponsor: Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS)

Cosponsors:

- Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI)

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