



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

OFFICE OF OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC RESEARCH

January 26, 2010

Mr. Jeff Ruch  
Executive Director  
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER)  
2000 P Street, NW, Suite 240  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Ruch,

Thank you for your "Data Quality Act Challenge: Assessment of Potential Tsunami Impact for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii" addressed to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) (hereafter "request"), received December 9, 2009, requesting correction of information under Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act (Public Law 106-554) (hereafter "Section 515"). The referenced document, originally disseminated electronically and in print in August 2006, titled "Assessment of Potential Tsunami Impact for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. NOAA Technical Memorandum OAR PMEL-131" (hereafter the Technical Memorandum). Based on our review, your request is denied because, in accordance with NOAA Information Quality Guidelines (IQG), 1) appropriate pre-dissemination review of the Technical Memorandum was conducted, and 2) the Technical Memorandum is not Influential Scientific Information (ISI). The NOAA IQG can be found at:  
[http://www.cio.noaa.gov/Policy\\_Programs/IQ\\_Guidelines\\_110606.html](http://www.cio.noaa.gov/Policy_Programs/IQ_Guidelines_110606.html)

A pre-dissemination review of the Technical Memorandum was conducted as called for by the NOAA IQG. In advance of publication, the Technical Memorandum was reviewed by NOAA Pacific Marine Laboratory (PMEL) scientists, PMEL management, and the PMEL editor. Furthermore, in advance of publication, supplementary review was provided by Professor Fai Chung, University of Hawaii ocean engineer and tsunami specialist.

In accordance with the IQG, the review process assured the utility, integrity and objectivity of the Technical Memorandum. The intended users for the Technical Memorandum were the NOAA Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). The utility of the Technical Memorandum was achieved by providing the CAO one component of their overall analytical/due diligence effort in determining any constraints on siting, planning and design of the NOAA Pacific Region Center (PRC). Other information from other sources included information on wind loading, weather conditions, seismic zone, bearing capacity of soils and substrate, lightning, site topography, utility infrastructure availability, historical considerations, environmental site conditions, etc. Such information ultimately assisted the NOAA CAO in structuring engineering and mitigating solutions for civil, structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, lightning protection, and architectural/historical compatibility, etc. for the project.



To ensure the integrity of all electronic information disseminated by NOAA, including the Technical Memorandum at issue, NOAA adheres to the standards set out in Appendix III, "Security of Automated Information Resources," OMB Circular A-130; the Computer Security Act; and the Government Information Security Reform Act.

The objectivity of the Technical Memorandum was ensured by applying the guidelines for interpreted products outlined in the NOAA IQG. The Technical Memorandum identified and used data and information sources of known quality, explained the methods used, and provided context for the assessment. Technically qualified individuals peer reviewed the Technical Memorandum prior to dissemination to ensure that the document was valid, complete, unbiased, objective, and relevant.

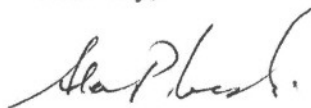
The Technical Memorandum, whose scope was limited to providing technical information relevant to the siting, planning and design of a NOAA facility, was evaluated and determined to not have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or private sector decisions. Based upon this finding, the Technical Memorandum was determined not to be Influential Scientific Information (ISI), and is therefore not subject to the requirements for ISI included in OMB's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review (OMB Peer Review Bulletin), issued December 16, 2004 (70 FR 2664, Jan. 14, 2005).

You may file a written appeal of this denial, as outlined in Part III.D.1. of the NOAA IQG, within 30 calendar days of the date of this correspondence. An appeal of an initial denial must include: a. the requester's name, current home or business address, and telephone number or electronic mail address (in order to ensure timely communication); b. a copy of the original request and any correspondence regarding the initial denial; and c. a statement of the reasons why the requester believes the initial denial was in error.

The complete appeal must be submitted to:

NOAA Section 515 Officer  
NOAA Executive Secretariat  
Herbert C. Hoover Building B Room 5230  
14<sup>th</sup> and Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Sincerely,



Alan Leonardi, Ph.D.  
Acting Director  
Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation

cc: Glenn Tallia, NOAA  
Carla Steinborn, NOAA  
Nancy Huang, NOAA



**Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility**

*Protecting Employees Who Protect The Environment*



**2000 P Street, NW • Suite 240 • Washington, D.C. 20036**

**Tel.: 202-265-PEER (7337) • Fax: 202-265-4192**

e-mail: [info@peer.org](mailto:info@peer.org) • website: <http://www.peer.org>

**Before the U.S. Department of Commerce  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FOR  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
RESPONSIBILITY**

**Complainant,**

**v.**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Agency.**

**Dkt. No.** \_\_\_\_\_

September 27, 2010

***Appeal of Denial of Data Quality Act  
Challenge***

***Assessment of Potential Tsunami Impact  
for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii***

**APPEAL OF DENIAL OF COMPLAINT OF  
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY (PEER)  
PURSUANT TO THE DATA QUALITY ACT OF 2000**

To: NOAA Section 515 Officer  
NOAA Executive Secretariat  
Herbert C. Hoover Building – Room 5230  
14th & Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20230

### **Procedural History**

On November 19, 2009, pursuant to the Data Quality Act of 2000 [Section 515 of the Fiscal Year 2001 Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act, Pub.L. 106-554], Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) submitted a complaint demanding that the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) withdraw or rescind its August 2006 *Assessment of Potential Tsunami Impact for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii* (NOAA Technical Memorandum OAR PMEL-131, hereinafter “the Assessment”) [ATTACHMENT I].

In a letter dated January 22, 2010, Ms. Carla Steinborn from the NOAA Office of Chief Information Officer acknowledged receipt of our Data Quality Act (also called Information Quality Act but hereinafter DQA) complaint and indicated that the agency expected to issue a “response no later than February 22, 2010” [ATTACHMENT II]. That date came and passed without the promised response.

On March 26, 2010, PEER wrote to Ms. Steinborn to inquire about the status of the NOAA response [ATTACHMENT III]. PEER received no response to this inquiry. By letter dated April 31, 2010, PEER appealed this extended delay as a constructive denial of our DQA complaint [ATTACHMENT IV]. PEER received no acknowledgement of or response to this appeal.

By e-mail on September 8, 2010, Ms. Sarah Brabson of the NOAA Office of Chief Information Officer transmitted a NOAA response to our original complaint and

acknowledged that despite the fact that the NOAA response was dated January 26, 2010, it had not been previously delivered [ATTACHMENT V].

The NOAA response dated January 26, 2010 denied our DQA complaint on two grounds:

1) appropriate pre-dissemination review of the Technical memorandum was conducted, and 2) the Technical Memorandum is not Influential Scientific Information. [ATTACHMENT VI].

As detailed below, PEER contests these reasons for denial as based on erroneous application of the NOAA's Information Quality Guidelines and a gross distortion of the facts about the Assessment.

### **Rationale for Appeal**

The PEER DQA complaint detailed how the Assessment was based on inaccurate, incomplete and unreliable information regarding the risks of tsunami impact on Ford Island, the proposed site of the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center. The less than two-page NOAA response 1) did not substantively respond to the specified bases of our complaint and 2) misapplied the NOAA Information Quality Guidelines in making specious procedural arguments for sloughing off our complaint.

In addition, the NOAA response raised the irrelevant issue of information integrity from tampering, as defined by the Government Information Security Reform Act, among other authorities. PEER did not contend that the assessment was tampered with or that its electronic security was breached. Our complaint revolved around the objectivity, accuracy and reliability of the information within the Assessment.

#### **I. Pre-Dissemination Review Failed to Ensure the Quality of the Assessment**

The NOAA response asserts that the Assessment underwent “pre-dissemination review...as called for by the NOAA IQG”. Further the NOAA response asserted:

The objectivity of the Technical Memorandum was ensured by applying the guidelines for interpreted products outlined in the NOAA IQG. The Technical Memorandum identified and used data and information sources of known quality, explained the methods used, and provided context for the assessment. Technically qualified individuals peer reviewed the Technical Memorandum prior to dissemination to ensure that the document was valid, complete, unbiased, objective and relevant.

Thus, a principal basis for NOAA denying our DQA complaint is that the Assessment underwent peer review and/or appropriate pre-dissemination review.

A. Pre-Dissemination Review Is Not a Complete Defense to a DQA Challenge

The NOAA denial erroneously concludes that the mere occurrence of peer review is a complete defense to a DQA challenge. That is an incorrect reading of the NOAA IQG. The existence of prior review does not end the data quality debate, it begins the debate. Peer review is not a conclusive guarantor of information quality, it only affects the burden of proof. As the Guidelines state:

The burden of proof is on the requester to show both the necessity and type of correction sought. Information that is subjected to a *formal, independent external peer review* is presumed to be objective...*The requestor has the burden of rebutting that presumption.*

Guidelines at III A. 4, emphasis added.

As argued below, the Assessment did not undergo “formal, independent external peer review” and is not entitled to any presumption of objectivity. Further, even if it did, the PEER complaint more than met its burden of rebutting any presumption of objectivity, completeness and absence of bias. Significantly, NOAA did not even mention, let alone rebut the PEER arguments adduced as the basis for our complaint.

B. Pre-Dissemination Review Was, at Best Informal and Did Not Ensure Quality

The NOAA response tacitly admits that the Assessment did not undergo a formal peer review as outlined in the OMB Peer Review Bulletin, when it argues that the Assessment was not influential scientific information and therefore was “not subject to the requirements” of the OMB standards for peer review.

Specifically, the NOAA response indicates that the sole pre-dissemination review was provided by “Pacific Marine Laboratory (PMEL) scientists, PMEL management, and the PMEL editor. Furthermore, in advance of publication, supplementary review was provided by Professor Fai Chung, University of Hawaii ocean engineer and tsunami specialist.” This cursory description gives no indication of how extensive was the pre-publication review, what if any issues were raised and, other than Professor Chung, what were the relevant qualifications of the PMEL reviewers.

On February 10, 2009, PEER submitted a request to NOAA under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) for “information documenting the peer reviewing of this assessment prior to its publication or, in the alternative, explaining the lack thereof” concerning NOAA Technical memorandum OAR PMEL-13, *Assessment of Potential Tsunami Impact for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii*. In a letter dated March 30, 2009, NOAA responded but did not provide any documentation that external or internal reviews had occurred. Instead, the agency offered only the following statement:

[The Assessment] was reviewed, in advance of publication following standard PMEL procedures for technical reports, including peer review by other PMEL scientists, review by laboratory management, and editorial review by the PMEL editor. The publication was also informally reviewed, in advance of publication, by Professor Fai Chung, University of Hawaii ocean engineer and tsunami specialist, who complimented the lead author on her scientific approach and results.



Note that this NOAA answer conceded that Professor Chung's review was "informal". Thus, no "formal, independent, third party review" took place, as contemplated by the NOAA IQG.

In a FOIA appeal on April 28, 2009, PEER again requested documentation that any review process had actually occurred. More than a year later, NOAA has yet to respond to this request. Nor did NOAA provide any evidence that any formal review occurred with PMEL personnel occurred. For the purposes of the appeal, we must assume that the review process created not a shred of records. For all we know, the PMEL review could have consisted solely of a spell-check for typos.

The only remaining question is whether this informal, largely internal review was "appropriate" given the significance of the issues influenced by the Assessment. The PEER complaint explained that reliance on the Assessment could result in significant loss of life (see arguments below). Surely, a document with public safety implications deserved a more formal review before it was disseminated.

Our complaint argued that NOAA's reliance upon an internal, informal review strongly suggested that the Assessment is a study based on incompletely or wholly erroneous evidence, created solely in order to buttress a politically-motivated decision by the agency to relocate its tsunami warning center to a location that, ironically, is itself vulnerable to disruption in the event of a tsunami. NOAA did not rebut this contention.

C. The Assessment Did Not Meet Objectivity Guidelines for Interpreted Products

NOAA asserted that the Assessment met the IQG standard for "interpreted products", ones that include original data and synthesized products which have been interpreted and contextualized. The NOAA response says that this standard was met



because “Technically qualified individuals peer reviewed the Technical Memorandum prior to dissemination to ensure that the document was valid, complete, unbiased, objective and relevant.”

As explained above, we have no indication that a peer review of any rigor was conducted nor do we know the qualifications of the NOAA reviewers. The IQG contain other criteria for interpreted products and the Assessment failed to meet these criteria. For example, the Assessment did not provide “information that demonstrates the quality and limitations of the interpreted products”.

The PEER DQA complaint detailed out these deficiencies but NOAA did not respond to a single specification contained in the PEER complaint, which are catalogued (but not reargued) here:

- I. The Assessment’s Methodology is Inaccurate and Unreliable.
  - a. The Shallow Water Modeling Used is Inaccurate
  - b. The Coefficient of Friction is set at an Inappropriate Constant
  - c. The Historical Data for Hawaiian Islands Is Ignored
  - d. The Assessment’s Conclusions Contradict Its Own Scientific Sources
- II. The Assessment is Incomplete Because It Fails to Address Several Key Issues.
  - a. The Possibility of a Multiple Wave Tsunami Pileup
  - b. The Potential of a Sumatra-Sized Wave Is Ignored
  - c. Conflict with External Reports
  - d. Probable Hazards to the Pontoon Bridge Accessing Ford Island Not Addressed
  - e. Probable Hazard of Strong Tsunami-Induced Currents Ignored

The fact that NOAA did not dispute a single deficiency outlined in the PEER complaint means that, for purposes of the appeal, NOAA must consider these critiques as valid. To the extent that NOAA maintains that a scientific study suffering from all of these deficiencies still represented information quality, then the agency Guidelines are meaningless and do not provide assurance of quality, objectivity and completeness as understood by the average person.

**II. The Assessment is Influential Scientific Information and Subject to NOAA's Information Quality Guidelines**

The NOAA response claims that that the "Technical Memorandum, whose scope was limited to providing technical information relevant to the siting, planning and design of a NOAA facility, was evaluated and determined not to have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or private sector decisions." However, NOAA does not indicate who made this evaluation and determination, when it was made or what criteria were used to reach this conclusion. Presumably, as with the pre-dissemination review, this determination was not reduced to writing. It is difficult to take this bald un-sourced statement seriously.

Moreover, the apparent reasoning by NOAA illustrates a further misinterpretation of the IQG. Influential scientific information is not a category an agency can opt into or out from. This categorization stems from the nature of the document itself, including its context and importance.

The Assessment clearly meets the definition of influential information, subject to information quality standards. NOAA Guidelines define information as "any communication or representation of knowledge such as facts or data, in any medium or form, including textual, numerical, graphic, cartographic, narrative, or audiovisual

forms.” The Assessment purports to be a representation of NOAA’s knowledge and data on tsunami inundation on the island of Oahu.

The Assessment is influential because it is reasonably expected to “have a genuinely clear and substantial impact on major public policy and private sector decisions.”. The Assessment plainly states that its purpose was to study the suitability of Ford Island as a site for the Pacific Region Center facility. See Assessment, p. 1-2.

Indeed, this point is conceded in the NOAA response where it states:

The utility of the Technical Memorandum was achieved by providing the CAO one component of their overall analytical/due diligence effort in determining any constraints on siting, planning and design of the NOAA Pacific Region Center.

The response notes that there were other factors that the CAO considered but, nonetheless, it is clear that the Assessment was influential in informing the CAO siting decision on the factor of tsunami risk. Thus, NOAA cannot simultaneously argue that the Assessment was not influential scientific information within the meaning of the IQG..

As our DQA complaint explains, the Assessment was used to justify a decision to move the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) to an island in an inland waterway. The PTWC serves a vital role in protecting populations from a tsunami hazard and therefore the location of said center is a matter of major public policy. In order to accurately assess the fitness of the Ford Island site, NOAA must use the best available data and processes, but has failed to do so in this case.

The PTWC bears significant responsibility for interpreting data and disseminating information to emergency response officials, the media and the public concerning tsunami-related events. The PTWC’s ability to perform this vital function is a major public safety concern. Not only does the PTWC serve the citizens of Hawaii and the

Pacific Coast, but it also serves also nearly all the other countries surrounding the Pacific, Indian and Caribbean basins. If the Center is moved based on the conclusions of the Assessment as it is currently drafted, NOAA will have significantly jeopardized PTWC's ability to successfully warn and protect the public from a tsunami disaster. This risk is unnecessary and unacceptable considering that the safety of millions could be jeopardized.

Our analysis is buttressed by a NOAA press release issued August 25, 2006 entitled "New Study Confirms Low Tsunami Risk at Pearl Harbor" to announce the Assessment [ATTACHMENT VII]. This news release declared:

NOAA's Center for Tsunami Research has completed a comprehensive tsunami modeling study for Pearl Harbor. The study concludes that the risk of a destructive tsunami inside Pearl Harbor is low. Model results show minor inundation even for the worst case scenario. The study has **direct relevance for NOAA's decision** to locate its new Pacific Regional Center on Ford Island – located in the middle of Pearl Harbor. The new center will consolidate NOAA operations, including the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, whose offices are currently scattered throughout the island of Oahu. (emphasis added)

While the NOAA response indicates the Assessment concerned only "one component ...in determining any constraints on siting" that one component was important enough for NOAA to issue a national news release – something it presumably does not often do for scientific information deemed not to be influential.

Further the NOAA release states that "These tsunami models [used in the study] have been thoroughly validated and are the bases for the new U.S. tsunami forecast system being implemented at NOAA's Tsunami Warning centers in Hawaii and Alaska." The importance of accurate reliable warning in tsunami forecasting has direct public

safety relevance and unquestioned “impact on important public policies or private sector decisions”.

### **Relief Requested**

Because of the potential loss of life that could result from moving PTWC to a site where it would be vulnerable in the event of a tsunami or even a large storm, PEER respectfully demands that NOAA withdraw or rescind the Assessment. Moreover, PEER strongly urges NOAA to conduct a new, thorough assessment of such risks *prior* to moving the PTWC to Ford Island. Accordingly, PEER reiterates our demands that the Department of Commerce and its National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration take the following steps to comply with the Data Quality Act:

1. Remove the *Assessment of Potential Tsunami Impact for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii* from official publication and cease further distribution.
2. Issue a public statement, posted on official websites, that the Assessment has been withdrawn from publication due to violations of the Data Quality Act.
3. Undertake a new externally peer-reviewed assessment concerning the potential impact of a tsunami on Pearl Harbor.

Thank in advance for your prompt attention to this appeal.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ruch  
Executive Director  
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER)  
2000 P Street, NW; Suite 240  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
(v) (202) 265-7337  
Fax (202) 265-4192



DEC 14 2010

Mr. Jeff Ruch  
Executive Director  
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility  
2000 P Street, NW; Suite 240  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Ruch:

This letter responds to your appeal (“Appeal”), on behalf of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), of the January 26, 2010, Denial of the Request for Correction (“Initial Decision”), received by PEER on September 8, 2010, of the August 2006 “Assessment of Potential Tsunami Impact for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii,” NOAA Technical Memorandum OAR PMEL-131 (“Assessment”). My office completed its review of your appeal and has the following response.

### Summary

In its appeal, PEER’s essential contentions are that:

1. The Assessment is subject to NOAA’s Information Quality Guidelines;
2. The Assessment constitutes “Influential Scientific Information”;
3. Pre-Dissemination review was informal and did not ensure quality; and
4. The Assessment did not meet the objectivity guidelines for interpreted products.

I agree with the first contention. However, after a careful review of the Assessment and the Initial Decision and for the reasons below, contentions 2 through 4 have been found to be without merit.

### Discussion

1. *The Assessment is Subject to NOAA’s Information Quality Guidelines*

PEER contends that the Assessment is “Influential Scientific Information” and therefore subject to NOAA’s Information Quality Guidelines (Guidelines). This statement confuses the applicability of two separate guidance documents, the Guidelines and the Office of Management and Budget’s Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review (OMB Peer Review Bulletin), issued December 16, 2004 (70 FR 2664, Jan. 14, 2005). The Guidelines “cover information disseminated by NOAA on or after October 1, 2002.”<sup>1</sup>

In June 2006, NOAA’s Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) tasked the Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory (PMEL) to determine whether the proposed site for its Pacific

<sup>1</sup> See NOAA Information Quality Guidelines, Part I.





Regional Center on Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii was at risk from the threat of a tsunami. This request was made as part of CAO's due diligence effort to evaluate the tsunami hazard at the proposed site of the new NOAA facility. PMEL completed the study in August 2006.

NOAA's Information Quality Guidelines explicitly state that they do not apply to "information produced for the internal management and operations of NOAA, and not **primarily** [emphasis added] intended for public dissemination." The Assessment was produced at the request of the CAO to provide model results for evaluating the suitability of Ford Island as a site for the development of the Pacific Region Center facility and was intended for its use as part of the CAO's due diligence effort. PMEL viewed the Assessment as management information produced for the internal management of NOAA and, therefore, it is arguably not subject to the Guidelines. Studies that are of scientific interest are often published as NOAA Technical Memoranda, as this one was. However, because the Assessment was disseminated electronically and in print, for purposes of this appeal, we assumed that the assessment is subject to the Guidelines.

## *2. The Assessment Does Not Constitute "Influential Scientific Information"*

"Influential scientific information" is a subset of the information covered by the Guidelines, and is further subject to the OMB Peer Review Bulletin. For the reasons described below, the Assessment does not fall within the definition of "influential scientific information" and is therefore not covered by the OMB Peer Review Bulletin.

Influential scientific information is defined by the Guidelines to mean "scientific information the agency reasonably can determine will have or does have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or private sector decisions." This definition is identical to the definition contained in section I(6) of the OMB Peer Review Bulletin; OMB provided considerable discretion to agencies regarding how best to implement the provisions of its "Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies." *See* 66 Fed. Reg. 49718, 49719 (Sept. 29, 2001).

The Assessment was considered by NOAA in making the decision to locate its new Pacific Regional Center on Ford Island, which is located in the middle of Pearl Harbor. The question, then, is whether NOAA's decision about where to locate the new Pacific Regional Center had "a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or important private sector decisions." NOAA's decision clearly did not have a substantial impact on important private sector decisions. Furthermore, although relocation is a decision important to NOAA, it was not a decision affecting an "important public policy."

NOAA has been consistent with its interpretation of what constitutes a public policy in this context, namely actions such as rulemakings, policy documents, or guidance that significantly affect a broad range of parties, interests, or stakeholders to the issue. The Assessment was never



intended to have, nor has it resulted in, any substantial impacts on public policy and therefore does not constitute “influential scientific information.”<sup>2</sup>

### 3. *Pre-Dissemination Review of the Assessment Met the Applicable Guidelines*

PEER contends that the pre-dissemination review of the Assessment was inadequate, as it was not a “formal, independent, third party” peer review as outlined in the OMB Peer Review Bulletin. As noted above, the Assessment did not constitute “influential scientific information” and was therefore not subject to the provisions of the OMB Peer Review Bulletin.

The applicable review process for “interpreted products” such as the Assessment is set forth in NOAA’s Guidelines:

*Interpreted products are reviewed.* Since the production of interpreted products often involves expert judgment, evaluation, and interpretation, these products are reviewed by technically qualified individuals to ensure that they are valid, complete, unbiased, objective, and relevant. Peer reviews, ranging from internal peer review by staff who were not involved in the development of the product to formal, independent, external peer review, are conducted at a level commensurate with the scientific information in the interpreted product.

Although this Assessment does not fall within the definition of “Influential Scientific Information,” NOAA takes seriously its commitment of ensuring the quality (*i.e.* utility, objectivity, and integrity) of all its information. The Assessment was reviewed by a peer review panel consisting of two external and one internal reviewer, to ensure that it was valid, complete, unbiased, objective, and relevant. Specifically, PMEL used a three-person peer panel to conduct a scientific review of the Assessment. The panel’s three peer reviewers were:

1. Dr. Yong Wei, a tsunami modeler and joint institute scientist with the University of Washington;
2. Dr. Fai Chung, a Professor of Ocean Engineering at the University of Hawaii who is a tsunami specialist; and
3. Dr. Stephen Hammond, NOAA scientist and PMEL Division Leader who reviews all publications from his division as part of the PMEL publication policy.

In addition to the three peer reviewers, Dr. Eddie Bernard, Director of PMEL reviewed the report as part of the PMEL publication policy. As co-author, he conducted technical reviews during the writing of the report. In publishing NOAA Technical Memorandum OAR PMEL-131, the

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<sup>2</sup> PEER notes that the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) serves a vital role in protecting populations from a tsunami hazard. To address concerns about any temporary failure of the PTWC, it should be noted that, as stated in NWS Policy Directive 10-7 (June 9, 2009), the West Coast/Alaska Tsunami Warning Center serves as a backup for the PTWC.

authors followed standard PMEL review procedures as described in the PMEL Handbook. The reviewers were technically qualified and highly respected in their fields. Their review of the Assessment clearly fulfilled the applicable standard set forth in the Guidelines.

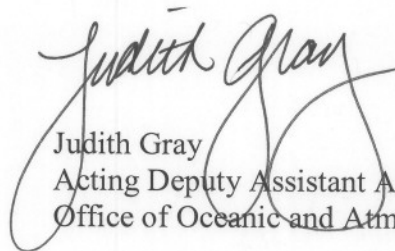
*4. The Assessment Met the Objectivity Guidelines for Interpreted Products, And Other Applicable Criteria.*

PEER contends that not only did NOAA fail to conduct a formal peer review, but that the Assessment was substantively flawed, in that it did not meet the standard for "objectivity" for interpreted products set forth in the Guidelines. In the Guidelines, objectivity is described as consisting of two distinct elements, presentation and substance: 1) the *presentation* element includes accuracy, clarity, and completeness of disseminated information, in an unbiased manner and in a proper context; 2) the *substance* refers to ensuring accurate, reliable, and unbiased information. The Guidelines also note that, in addition to the review process, the objectivity of interpreted products is achieved by using data of known quality or from sources acceptable to the relevant scientific communities, applying sound analytical techniques, and presenting the information in the proper context. The study upon which the Assessment is based was a specific application of an existing numerical model carefully used at PMEL and the methodology of the model had been published in the refereed literature establishing the model's credibility. The Assessment provides accurate, reliable, and unbiased information and met all of these criteria, as confirmed by the peer review panel, and therefore meets the objectivity guidelines for interpreted products.

**Conclusion**

PEER has not met its burden of proof for showing the necessity for corrections sought. For the reasons stated above, the appeal is denied.

Sincerely,



Judith Gray  
Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator  
Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research

cc: Glenn Tallia, NOAA  
Mark Vincent, NOAA  
Sarah Brabson, NOAA  
Michael Uhart, NOAA