

Presented to the Planetary Science Subcommittee, 9-10 March, 2016

LEAG Finding on addition of Ocean Worlds to New Frontiers

LEAG strongly supports the release of a draft-for-comment of the New Frontiers Announcement of Opportunity (AO), the formal AO to be issued in January 2017. However, the inclusion of new theme - Ocean Worlds (Titan and Enceladus) is a major cause for community concern. Such targets for New Frontiers missions were not prioritized in the current Decadal Survey and they were not added by a transparent community-wide process to properly reevaluate the overarching strategy and priorities, such as was done by the NOSSE (New Opportunities in Solar System Exploration) report of 2008. Altering the New Frontiers candidate mission list by the inclusion of missions that were not considered by the Decadal Survey process undermines the credibility and balance of the entire Vision and Voyages report. LEAG is concerned that the addition of the Ocean Worlds missions to the New Frontiers AO without an opportunity for community input would set a bad precedent and erode community confidence in the Decadal process. LEAG urges PSD to find another programmatic means to accomplish Ocean Worlds science in concert with the existing New Frontiers and Discovery programs.

Rationale: The addition of a new mission target will significantly impact the work the community has been doing in planning for future New Frontier missions. A mission to Titan or Enceladus that would achieve New Frontiers class science requires years to develop to a mature concept. Therefore, the addition of the new missions at this late date raises the concern that many immature concepts would be proposed. While we understand that the Decadal Survey is but one source of input, the addition of Ocean Worlds creates the perception that proposals aimed at these additional targets would be at an unfair advantage and may get chosen even though they are at a more immature stage than those vetted by the decadal process.