



October 22, 2012

Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Doc Hastings, Chairman
1203 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Office
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ed Markey, Ranking Member
2108 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Congress Urged to Address Growing Crisis for Oceans, Sea Life

Dear Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member Markey,

We are writing to respectfully request that you convene a hearing on the subject of ocean acidification either this year or early next year. Our nation has a stake in addressing this growing crisis that threatens our oceans, our sea life and the people that depend on them.

Just last month, more than 500 of the world's top ocean acidification scientists sounded the alarm at the Third International Symposium on the Ocean in a High-CO₂ World. Carbon pollution has caused seawater to become 30 percent more acidic, and this rapid change is unprecedented in the past 300 million years. The key findings of the conference punctuated the need to address ocean acidification now before the consequences severely damage our fisheries, ocean ecosystems and coastal economies.

- Coral reefs are near a collapse threshold and will cease to exist later this century because they cannot exist in waters below the tipping point of 7.8 pH. Most of the world's coral reefs are already stressed. Hawaii's coral reefs currently experience CO₂ levels not predicted to occur until later in the century, and coral cover at the Great Barrier Reef declined to 50 percent of what it was in 1985. In another 10 years, it will lose half of its remaining coral cover, putting it on par with reefs in Florida and the Caribbean.
- Already ocean acidification exposes sea life along the Pacific Coast to seasonally corrosive waters, and California's surface waters will be permanently corrosive to shellfish as early as 2030, with a tenfold increase in intensity of acidification by 2050. The Pacific Northwest has suffered massive oyster die-offs definitively linked to ocean acidification. New research shows that an increase of CO₂ of just 100ppm, which we're on target to reach within 50 years, can significantly decrease the survival of scallops, clams and sea urchins. Just a 25 percent reduction in mollusk harvests could cause the United States an economic loss of \$10 billion by mid-century.

- Ocean acidification may already be increasing the toxicity of harmful algal blooms known as “red tides.” High CO₂ levels in seawater magnify by fivefold the toxins of harmful algae. These toxic red tides poison shellfish, marine mammals, fish, and even cause paralytic shellfish poisoning in people.
- Fish are at risk from ocean acidification. Reef fish, like the orange clownfish in the movie *Finding Nemo*, suffer from behavior and brain malfunctioning due to ocean acidification. Some fish lose their ability to avoid predators and instead are attracted to them, making the fish five to nine times more likely to be eaten. Ocean acidification also impairs the growth and development of young fish, such as Atlantic herring, which can affect their survival and abundance.

These scientific findings are an early warning of ocean acidification’s consequences on our fisheries, wildlife and economy. In 2009 the ocean-dependent economy, including sectors such as tourism and fisheries, contributed over \$223 billion annually to the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) and provided more than 2.6 million jobs.

In the closing plenary of the conference, marine biologist Dr. Sam Dupont, Gothenburg University, said, “Acidification is real, fast, and directly related to CO₂ emissions... We know a major catastrophic event is coming. We know how to prevent it.” Accordingly, we request that you hold a hearing on ocean acidification as soon as possible. The oceans are loved by Americans of all political stripes. We ought not to impoverish future generations of these national treasures by neglecting this crisis, especially when solutions are within our grasp. A hearing would give the issue full public airing so that we can work toward addressing this life-altering threat to our oceans.

Sincerely,



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enclosure: An infographic on the dangers of ocean acidification.
cc: Members of the House Natural Resources Committee