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**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE JOHN FLEMING**  
**CHAIRMAN**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE,**  
**OCEANS AND INSULAR AFFAIRS**  
**AT THE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON**  
**THE FY'12 BUDGET REQUEST OF THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND**  
**ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION (NOAA)**  
**MARCH 31, 2011**

As I am sure you are aware, we are hearing from a lot of fishermen about reduced harvest levels and fishery closures. In many cases, fishermen are frustrated either because the data which is being used to close fisheries is old or because the reason for the closure is not being adequately explained. I am sympathetic to both concerns. And while this budget proposal does add some new funding for stock assessments, if new information from new stock surveys is not included, you will be using much of the same old data in the assessments.

Old data means your scientists and fishery managers include multiple layers of precaution when running their models. More precaution means lower harvest levels. Lower harvest levels mean fishery closures or restrictions which means less jobs and more economic harm to coastal communities. No funding for new information means NOAA can continue to use old data, hiding behind the "best scientific information available" argument. This is not acceptable.

NOAA prides itself on being a scientific agency yet it continues to use old data when making management decisions - not just for fisheries management but also for Endangered Species Act decisions. You can imagine the frustration of fishermen whose livelihoods are threatened by an agency using ten-year old data at the same time the agency is cutting the ship time available to do stock surveys. You can imagine the frustration of fishermen who are told that recreational catch data is unavailable by an agency that wants to spend \$2 billion on satellite programs but cuts observer coverage. You can imagine the frustration of our Full Committee Chairman when NOAA closes a valuable fishery based on little or no reliable data on Steller sea lions and their feeding habits at the same time NOAA is not funding any research to get the necessary answers. And you need to understand my frustration of seeing an agency grow 41% since 2008 but not addressing these issues. That has to change.

While I understand that NOAA is more than a fisheries management agency, it often seems that NOAA is more interested in new technology than it is in getting basic information on how many fish are out there and available to fishermen. There is also a perception that the conservation aspects of NOAA's missions overshadow the missions to utilize the fishery

resources of this Nation. I'm afraid this budget request will not change this perception or the minds of those facing fishery closures and fishery restrictions.

Safe seafood is also a priority for our country, and certainly for the Gulf of Mexico. A recent nationwide survey by the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board found 70 percent of people are still concerned about eating Gulf seafood. For many this is troubling because Gulf seafood already undergoes some of the most intensive testing in the world – and test results that show Gulf seafood is safe to eat.

I, along with many others, am concerned that until the public has a better understanding of the federal government's seafood safety work in the Gulf, consumer confidence will remain low, Americans will avoid healthful seafood, and the Gulf Coast economy will struggle to rebuild. I recently joined my colleagues in writing to the administration and strongly recommend that the Administration develop a robust, top-down approach to communicate to the American people that Gulf seafood is safe and healthy. I would urge you, consistent with your agency's mission to "conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet our Nation's economic, social and environmental needs" to be a part of the development of this approach and where appropriate, to work closely with the Gulf states and BP to effectively communicate your work and testing results on the safety of Gulf seafood to the American public.

Having said all of that, I encourage you today to address these challenges with the Subcommittee as you present the President's FY 2012 budget for NOAA. I would also like to thank Eric Schwaab, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, for being here to answer questions specific to the National Marine Fisheries Service portion of the NOAA budget.