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**Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings**
Committee on Natural Resources
Before the Full Committee Oversight Hearing on
***“The Council on Environmental Quality’s FY 2013 Funding Request
and the Effects on NEPA, National Ocean Policy and
Other Federal Environmental Policy Initiatives”***
On Wednesday, March 7, 2012

I want to thank Chairwoman Sutley for coming before this Committee again.

As many Members may know, despite having jurisdiction over the National Environmental Policy Act and the Council on Environmental Quality, this Committee has not held an oversight hearing over CEQ’s budget for many years.

As the environmental policy arm of the White House, CEQ provides guidance to all federal agencies through policy initiatives and the interpretation of statutes and regulations. As such, many of the initiatives developed by CEQ affect agencies and programs within this Committee’s jurisdiction. One of these policy initiatives that we have significant interest in is the National Ocean Policy.

This Committee has already held two oversight hearings on the National Ocean Policy. Unfortunately, we still have many of the same concerns and questions after the hearings.

While the main purpose of this hearing is to review the budget request of CEQ, that document does not provide much detail on how the funding will be used to implement the variety of environmental initiatives. I hope this hearing serves as a way to get more information on how the National Ocean Policy specifically is being funded.

Along those lines, almost two weeks ago, I sent a letter to Chair Sutley asking a number of questions and requesting a number of documents. While I understand some of these requests will take some time to comply with, I certainly hoped for answers to the budget-related questions prior to today’s hearing. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

I asked the questions because the National Ocean Policy appears to be a very large undertaking - one that will require a lot of resources from a lot of different agencies. Yet no agency seems to be requesting funding specifically for this purpose.

This implies to me that either nothing is planned for FY 2013 to implement the Policy, or all of these agencies are quietly siphoning money from other activities to fund this unauthorized activity. Since it appears many agencies are implementing the Policy despite the fact that the Implementation Plan is still in draft form, I can only assume agencies are reluctant to tell Congress how much they are spending and where the money is coming from.

In the letter, I asked a number of specific questions regarding the funding of the June 2010 workshop held here in Washington, D.C. and the funding of the Governance Coordinating Committee (GCC) - a body that has already been appointed and is apparently holding meetings. Despite the fact that this whole National Ocean Policy is supposed to be conducted in a transparent manner, this body has met in closed session a number of times. I am unaware of any notice of the meetings being published and there are no transcripts or notes available from any of the meetings.

And despite the National Ocean Policy's intent to reach inland activities to the uppermost reaches of each watershed and tributary, there are no inland states represented on the GCC. This does not bode well for transparency and inclusiveness.

The letter also requested the public comment period for the Draft National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan be extended for 90 days. Although CEQ granted only a 30-day extension, this extension may have been for naught based on comments we have reviewed so far, since many of the affected industries feel that their continued participation in the process is being ignored. I ask again that you provide the extension for the full 90 days.

We will likely hear today how huge strides have been made by allowing the Regional Fishery Management Councils to have a seat on the Regional Planning Bodies. Unfortunately, it's done in such a tortured manner that it really just gives the Governor another governmental seat. It's amazing the steps being taken in order to appear to be transparent when in fact the Regional Planning Bodies remain FACA-exempt bodies.

I want to thank Chair Sutley for coming before our Committee again today and I look forward to your testimony and a continuing dialog including full answers to the letter I referenced earlier, and about your budget and the National Ocean Policy.