

## Opening Statement

Good afternoon. First, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome everyone to the first Water, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee hearing this year. We have several returning members and quite a few new members on the subcommittee. I look forward to working with each one of you.

The jurisdiction of this subcommittee is broad, and includes managing, developing, and protecting America's water supply, protecting habitats and wildlife, managing coastal and marine environments and fisheries, and sportsmen's issues, to name a few. These issues are critically important, and I welcome the ability of this subcommittee in this new Congress to identify challenges and work to build common-sense, scientifically based solutions. That means this subcommittee is going to be very busy.

While many of these issues are complicated, I'm asking all of you to roll up your sleeves and work together to develop **real** solutions, so that Americans can continue to sustainably use and enjoy our water, oceans, and wildlife for years to come. As Chairman, my goal is to start with the facts and address these challenges head on.

In that vein, the focus of today's hearing is the health of our oceans and the coastal communities that depend on them. More than forty percent of the U.S. population lives in coastal shoreline counties. These communities depend on ocean-related industries like fisheries, tourism, and shipping. Businesses and jobs directly dependent on ocean and Great Lakes resources contribute \$352 billion to the United States Gross Domestic Product annually and employ over 3.1 million Americans. And no matter where you live in this country, we all depend on the ocean for the air we breathe and for regulating our climate. We need to keep our oceans healthy to ensure our economies, communities, and planet stay healthy too.

But, our oceans and coasts are facing an increasing number of threats, including ocean acidification, increased frequency and intensity of storms, vanishing polar ice caps, melting permafrost, pollution, overfishing, sea level rise, harmful algal blooms, shifting water

temperatures, coral reef die offs, and massive flooding. These threats are only exacerbated by climate change. Of the 23 members on this subcommittee, well over half of us represent coastal districts or districts close to the shore. Those of us representing coastal districts are seeing the impacts firsthand, but it's important to note that every district in the country benefits from America's oceans—and every district is impacted by their failing health.

In my district, commercial and tribal salmon fisheries are suffering due to severe drought and warming waters, dealing a multi-million dollar blow to our salmon fishermen and harming tribal communities, year after year. And because of massive algal blooms caused by warming ocean temperatures, the dungeness crab fishery lost \$110 million in revenue during the 2015-2016 season. Although NOAA later declared that season a fishery disaster and Congress has appropriated disaster funds, our fishermen have yet to see a single dollar in federal assistance because of holdups at the Department of Commerce as well as the impacts of the government shutdown.

Warmer oceans have also led to a quietly escalating crisis in the kelp forests along California's coast. Explosions of purple sea urchin populations, starving abalone, melting sea stars, and barren underwater seascapes where there was once a lush kelp forest— all of this is upending a critical coastal ecosystem and having ripple effects on fisheries, wildlife, and communities along the North Coast.

These are just a few examples of climate change impacts that are happening now, in my district. I don't have time to mention the other ocean impacts, from acidification to sea level rise, but the point is that now is the time to do something. Our constituents deserve action.

It is important to note that while our oceans are at increasing risk from the impacts of climate change, oceans can also be part of the solution. By comprehensively protecting ocean ecosystems, we will also strengthen a key tool to mitigate carbon emissions, naturally protect vulnerable coastlines, and keep fisheries sustainable in the face of a changing environment.

I am looking forward to hearing from an esteemed panel of experts and community leaders on these topics. We have a lot to learn from them. We will be hearing from a former EPA administrator, a leading scientist in her field, a representative from the fishing community, a leader fighting for the public health of her community, and a Chieftess of a historic coastal African American community that is already facing the effects of climate change.

This subcommittee is going to hit the ground running. Ocean health is critical for people and the planet, and it's time to prepare and adapt our coasts for the future that has already arrived. I look forward to all the important legislation that will pass through this subcommittee this congress, and I'm excited to hear from this incredible panel of witnesses.