

**Statement of Congressman Don Young before the House Natural Resources Committee
Oversight Field Hearing on: “NOAA’s Steller Sea Lion Science and Fishery Management
Restrictions - Does the Science Support the Decisions: October 17, 2011 – Seattle,
Washington**

Chairman Hastings, thank you for holding this hearing on a topic that is of great interest to both of our states, and for hosting me in your great state of Washington.

The other day, I was reminded about a hearing held on this same topic in 1999. At that hearing, my friend, former Chairman Jim Saxton said, *“If you can clearly indentify a problem and a solution, then everyone will work together to accomplish the goal. If there is scientific uncertainty, distrust and animosity, then the process of cooperatively working together to find a solution is doomed to fail.”*

Over a decade later, sadly, nothing has changed and we’re talking about the same issue and asking the same questions. Most shocking, significant taxpayer dollars have been directed towards research on the Steller Sea Lion, yet the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) still cannot answer basic questions, and is making decisions that impact the economies of an entire region and countless individual families with grossly limited data.

Once again, the Agency cannot say with any certainty what is causing the population decline, but fishermen are again paying the price. While we have no idea if these closures and restrictions will benefit the sea lion, we do know that they will have devastating effects on the fishermen and fishing communities.

From all the evidence I’ve seen, I can reasonably draw only one conclusion—we’re confronted with an Agency that has a premise, but a lack of information to prove or disprove it. And out of fear of a lawsuit by extreme organizations the Agency hides behind “the best available science” excuse and exercises an overabundance of precaution akin to someone who can’t swim refusing to bathe.

I want to commend the States of Alaska and Washington for taking it upon themselves to work together to find answers to these outstanding questions. Among other things, they found that the Biological Opinion’s (BiOp) conclusions are contradictory to their own science, weren’t adequately peer reviewed, and are not supported by scientific evidence.

As Alaska and Washington have aptly demonstrated, this NMFS doesn’t have the best available science, or even complete science, and, as a result, our fishermen and communities will suffer.

Once again, Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and I, like you, look forward to examining this issue more closely today and hearing from our witnesses.