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Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Expert Calls on Congress to Address Climate Change

Dr. Jane Lubchenco Testifies that More Effective Policies Are Critical for the Long-term Health and Prosperity of Our Oceans

April 29, 2008 (Washington, D.C.) – The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative announced that one of its key commissioners will testify today before the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. Dr. Jane Lubchenco, a Wayne and Gladys Valley Professor of Marine Biology and Distinguished Professor of Zoology at Oregon State University, will speak before Congress during a hearing entitled, “Rising Tides, Rising Temperatures; Global Warming’s Impacts on the Oceans.” Using concrete scientific evidence, Dr. Lubchenco, who had served on the Pew Oceans Commission and now serves for the Joint Initiative, will address the debilitating effects of climate change on our oceans and the implications of these changes for U.S. ocean policy.

“Climate change is already impacting ocean ecosystems in U.S. waters and around the world,” states Dr. Lubchenco in her testimony today. “If society wishes to continue to benefit from the bounty and the beauty of the oceans, it will need to implement new and significantly more effective policies than currently exist.”

In her testimony, Dr. Lubchenco will describe a recently discovered phenomenon along the coasts of Washington and Oregon. Her research team has discovered a new dead zone, an area of the ocean where the levels of oxygen are too low to support many forms of life. Unlike most other dead zones, however, the zone in the Pacific Northwest appears to be caused by changes in atmospheric and oceanic conditions, both of which could be related to climate change. As a result, mass depletions of sea life have been documented, and the long-term consequences to the region’s fisheries could be potentially disastrous.

In addition to her discussion of dead zones, Dr. Lubchenco will educate Congress on three other impacts of climate change on our oceans, which are rising ocean temperatures, increases in sea levels and the rising acidity of seawater. These effects pose serious threats, not only to the organisms that live within the oceans, but also to the many benefits that oceans provide to people in the United States.

In direct response to the climate change crisis, Dr. Lubchenco will offer Congress six suggestions for maintaining the health and prosperity of our ocean waters. They are the following:

1. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions significantly
2. Avoid mitigation ‘solutions’ that trigger unintended consequences

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3. Prepare to adapt human infrastructure to changes that are inevitable
4. Manage human activities to maximize likelihood that species can adapt
5. Invest in scientific monitoring and research to guide decisions, and
6. Educate citizens about options and consequences

These policy recommendations are highly supported in a recent white paper released by the Joint Initiative, "Addressing Oceans and Climate Change in Federal Legislation." For more information on the impacts of climate change on our oceans, or more details on Dr. Lubchenco's testimony today, please visit www.jointoceancommission.org.

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The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission to catalyze ocean policy reform. The Joint Initiative is guided by a ten-member task force, five from each commission, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins (U.S. Navy, Ret.) and the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, chairs of the U.S. Commission and Pew Commission, respectively. The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform.