

Testimony of Dr. Jane Lubchenco
Senate Commerce Committee
February 12, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Senator Hutchison, and distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Obama's nominee for Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. I am grateful for the courtesy shown to me by the Members of this Committee with whom I have visited over the past several weeks, and I am eager to continue and deepen our dialogue.

I come before you today with the love and support of a wonderful family. I wish to thank my 91-year old mother, a pediatrician, and my late father, a surgeon and Army Captain, for encouraging and enabling their six daughters to pursue their dreams while instilling in each of us a deep sense of values, family, love and heritage. I thank my sisters for teaching me the merits of compromise, humility and balance. I'm pleased that my husband Bruce and son Duncan are able to be here today and I'm grateful to them for their continuing encouragement and love. And I wish to thank my staff and colleagues in Oregon and around the country for all of their support.

I was fortunate to grow up in Colorado where I developed a deep appreciation for the land -- hunting and fishing with my father, hiking and camping with family and friends. I also grew to understand the pervasive importance of weather, especially from family stories about the extended droughts in South Carolina in the late 20's that triggered my paternal grandparents' move to Colorado.

I first became enamored with the oceans during a college class in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. To a Colorado native, the life in the sea seemed exotic and endlessly fascinating. Little did I realize then that life in the oceans is also essential to human prosperity and well-being -- both along the coasts and inland. My exposure to the oceans was love at first sight and my life's work was set in motion.

I am currently a professor of marine biology and zoology at Oregon State University, where I have taught since 1977. I lead a large interdisciplinary team of scientists studying the large marine ecosystem off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California. We focus on understanding how the ecosystem is changing and how society might recover and sustain the jobs, recreational opportunities, healthy seafood and wild beauty that all depend upon healthy ocean ecosystems. Indeed, I have spent my entire career focused on the connections between the land, sea and air and between people and the land and ocean.

Throughout my teaching, leadership of large organizations, and participation in public service, I have emphasized the important role of clear scientific input in decision making. I have stressed my belief that science should inform, not dictate, decision-making.

I have gained a wealth of experience in leading large, complex projects and organizations and serving on Boards of Directors for major foundations and organizations. These projects, organizations and boards include the American Association for the Advance of Science, the International Council for Science, the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans, the National Science Board, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the Environmental Defense Fund and Oregon Governor Kulongoski's Advisory Group on Global Warming. I believe that these experiences have prepared me well to serve the Nation by leading NOAA.

My students have always been an inspiration. Young minds are adept at challenging one's thinking and introducing novel ideas. If I was talking with them right now about NOAA, and why I'm so excited to have the honor of being nominated to lead the agency, I'd say this.

NOAA is the crown jewel of the Commerce Department. It is an indispensable partner with the private sector in creating jobs and growth all along our coasts. It is also the trusted steward of a bounty of marine resources that belong to all Americans. It helps to protect lives and property in times of natural disaster. And it is the premier government agency for applied science.

I tell my students that science is more than just fascinating knowledge, it is also useful knowledge. I believe passionately that science should inform our decisions. I can think of no better place to use my knowledge and experience than at NOAA. Working with you, and using the best available science as our guide, here is what I think we can do.

- We can add hundreds of millions of new dollars to the economy by bringing back fisheries – both commercial and recreational.
- We can improve farming, lower insurance rates, and make air travel safer by improving weather forecasting.
- We can spur the creation of new industries. Improved climate forecasting, for example, can serve as the backbone of new enterprises helping businessmen and public servants alike make better decisions about infrastructure, public safety, consumer needs and product research and development.
- We can protect and recover bays, beaches, rivers and oceans that amaze, inspire and connect us all.

My love of oceans, scientific knowledge and ability to find common ground among diverse perspectives led to my service on the Pew Oceans Commission and the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. I have spent a good deal of time thinking about the future of NOAA and its work. My vision for NOAA is strongly colored by the experience of traveling around the country doing public hearings with the Commission. We listened to people from all walks of life -- on the coasts and in the heartland. The consistent theme from CEOs to fishermen's wives, from farmers to coastal residents was the same: There is an intimate connection between Americans and our coasts and oceans. Fifty percent of us live in coastal areas; most of the rest love to visit beaches and eat seafood. Sixty percent of the country's GDP is generated in coastal communities. NOAA and Congress

have the job of protecting the oceans and Great Lakes. But it is not just protecting nature for its own sake. Jobs and a healthy environment go hand-in-hand – in the ocean as well as on the land.

Now our country must rise to a new challenge -- dealing with the impacts of the changing climate. In my work on the Ocean Commissions, I heard firsthand from businesses and state and local governments about the need for better information and predictions about the impacts of climate change in communities all across this country. From concern about droughts and sea level rise to changes in the chemistry of the ocean, there is a real hunger for more and better information. If confirmed, I will work to create a National Climate Service, which would be similar to the National Weather Service, within NOAA. NOAA is the best agency in the government to synthesize the scientific data on climate change and create products and services that can be used by the public to guide important decisions such as where to build a road or wind turbines. This idea has been studied by the agency, the National Academy of Sciences, and by members of this Committee. It is an idea whose time has come, and I would like to make it happen.

Being the Administrator of NOAA is a big job. Some of the challenges I know well from my work: Ending overfishing; anticipating the consequences of climate change; preparing for natural disasters in a time when resources are tight; restoring ecosystems on which we depend for food, water and livelihoods.

Other challenges I'm just learning. Getting the satellite program back on track is chief among them. I look forward to working with you to strengthen NOAA as a partner with business in creating economic growth and as a trusted steward of America's oceans, Great Lakes and coasts.

I have great admiration for the legions of dedicated scientists and other talented professionals at NOAA. I know that this Committee and the Congress has been very supportive of NOAA and its work. I relish the opportunity to lead the team. I pledge to bring transparency, fairness, integrity and accountability to the job, using a consultative and collaborative approach. If confirmed, I will work hard with the Members of this Committee, the Senate, and the House in realizing the great potential inherent in NOAA. Together we can provide America the best climate change science, restore her ocean's vitality and recharge our economy, putting us on a path to sustainability.

Again, thank you very much for your courtesy, Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee.