

May 16, 2011

National Climate Assessment Development and Advisory Committee
c/o Dr. Cynthia Decker
Designated Federal Official
NOAA
SSMC1 Room 11230
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

To the National Climate Assessment Development and Advisory Committee:

We are writing to urge the Committee to include and elevate ocean acidification as a priority issue in the 2013 National Climate Assessment.

The effects of ocean acidification are already being felt in U.S. coastal waters, and the consequences of carbon pollution for marine ecosystems are growing ever-more severe. Numerous national and international scientific and policy bodies have identified ocean acidification as an urgent, significant, and long-term threat to ocean ecosystems, food security, and society. In its 2010 report *Ocean Acidification: A National Strategy to Meet the Challenges of a Changing Ocean*, the National Research Council of the National Academies warned of the threats posed by ocean acidification to coral reefs, fisheries, and protected species, concluding:

The chemistry of the ocean is changing at an unprecedented rate and magnitude due to anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions; the rate of change exceeds any known to have occurred for at least the past hundreds of thousands of years. Unless anthropogenic CO₂ emissions are substantially curbed, or atmospheric CO₂ is controlled by some other means, the average pH of the ocean will continue to fall. Ocean acidification has demonstrated impacts on many marine organisms. While the ultimate consequences are still unknown, there is a risk of ecosystem changes that threaten coral reefs, fisheries, protected species, and other natural resources of value to society¹.

Our nation's National Ocean Policy has identified "Resiliency and Adaptation to Climate Change and Ocean Acidification" as one of nine priority objectives². At a hearing on "The Administration's View on the State of Climate Science" held by the House Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming on 2 December 2009, Jane Lubchenco (Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and John Holdren (Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy) highlighted ocean acidification as an important climate science issue.

¹ www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12904

² www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/oceans/objectives

At the international level, the IPCC has elevated the importance of ocean acidification in its next AR5 Assessment Report, has designated ocean acidification as a cross-cutting theme in the AR5, and held an international workshop on the impacts of ocean acidification in January 2011³. The United Nations Environment Programme concluded in its 2010 report *The Environmental Consequences of Ocean Acidification* that ocean acidification's impact on marine organisms is a threat to food security⁴. The report documents that ocean acidification is measurable and increasing, which poses a threat to fisheries resources and the billions of people that have a marine-based diet. Clearly, ocean acidification is a topic that requires prominence in any discussion of the science and impacts of climate change.

However, ocean acidification is nowhere specifically mentioned in key publicly available documents related to the ongoing National Climate Assessment, including the proposed outline of the report and the interim strategy. This is particularly troubling given that the assessment is pursuant to Section 106 of the Global Change Research Act (GCRA) of 1990, which calls for an assessment of the effects of *global change*. The GCRA defines “*global change*” to include “*changes in the global environment (including alterations in ...oceans...) that may alter the capacity of the Earth to sustain life.*” Ocean acidification clearly meets this definition.

We therefore urge the Committee to elevate the status of ocean acidification in the assessment to a level that is commensurate with the threat. We furthermore call upon the Committee to clearly demonstrate that the issue is being given a higher priority by explicitly including ocean acidification in the report outline and other assessment documents; and by including the issue in workshops and other efforts to engage and inform the public.

Sincerely,

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³ <http://oceanacidification.wordpress.com/2010/12/19/renate-christ-ocean-acidification-in-upcoming-ipcc-assessment/>; www.ipcc-wg2.gov/meetings/workshops/Proposal_OceanAcidification_EM.pdf

⁴ www.unep.org/dewa/pdf/Environmental_Consequences_of_Ocean_Acidification.pdf

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