

Statement of Chairwoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Oversight Hearing Regarding Management of the West Coast Salmon Fisheries
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans
Thursday May 15, 2008

The Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans meets this morning to hear testimony regarding the National Marine Fisheries Service's failed leadership in the management and conservation of West Coast salmon fisheries. Sadly, this is not a failure that can be made up in summer school like calculus class. Instead, it is one that could take years—if not decades—to overcome and one that will have profound impacts for communities up and down the coast.

Salmon stocks listed on the Endangered Species list and the shut down of fishing seasons have become all too common place. Last year, it was Klamath Chinook. This year, it's the Sacramento fall-run Chinook salmon--the backbone of the ocean fishery. Commercial and recreational fishermen, equipment suppliers, and restaurateurs all depend on these fish for their livelihoods.

Last month, when the Pacific Council voted to close the 2008 Chinook salmon fishing season, the closure was unprecedented in its magnitude. Fishing businesses all along the west coast are shut down. The States of California, Oregon, and Washington requested \$274 million dollars in disaster assistance, and Secretary Gutierrez declared a commercial fishery failure. Many fear that the season will need to be closed for at least two more years.

Agency scientists have pointed to unfavorable ocean conditions in 2005 as a determining factor. While this may be, ocean conditions are largely beyond our control, and salmon stocks have been declining for years due to many human impacts. It is NOAA Fisheries' responsibility to address these human caused impacts and ensure that salmon stocks are healthy and resilient enough to sustain the natural disturbances they will inevitably encounter.

Yet, in the case of salmon stocks that are in the greatest need of protection—those listed under the ESA—NOAA Fisheries seems unable to produce a scientifically based, legally defensible Biological Opinions in the Sacramento, the Klamath, or the Columbia, the three major salmon-producing rivers of the West.

Time and again across these rivers, the courts have consistently found that NOAA Fisheries has developed BiOps that fail to use the best available science, are based on conclusions that do not match their scientific findings, and fail to account for the changes in the environment that the Agency knows are coming.

Why has the Agency failed to issue BiOps that will protect endangered salmon stocks and will bolster other declining stocks in the process? I am sure this is a question

that many coastal communities have asked themselves repeatedly over the past several years, and I am not sure there is a good answer.

To the credit of the fishing community, many supported this year's closure at their own expense for the sake of the resource. NOAA Fisheries owes them an answer. It also needs to demonstrate the leadership needed to improve salmon management and conservation up and down the coast and rebuild healthy salmon stocks that will sustain the occasional changes in ocean conditions as well as the long term changes in the climate that are both inevitable.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the first panel on how Biological Opinions can be strengthened, and how we can move toward ecosystem management of all salmon stocks. The stories we will hear from the witnesses on the second panel should not be repeated.