

**Statement of
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Hearing On
“Protection and Restoration of The Chesapeake Bay”
July 30, 2008**

Good afternoon. Today the subcommittee will conduct the second in a series of hearings to assess the state of our nation's great waters, and what it will take to better protect and restore them. Today's hearing focuses on the Chesapeake Bay. We will receive testimony from the GAO, the EPA, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the University of Maryland regarding the condition of the bay and their recommendations on implementing action to safeguard and restore this national treasure.

Narrowing our focus from the previous hearing on coasts and estuaries, the subcommittee will now examine our country's largest estuary, the Chesapeake Bay. Covering roughly 64,000 square miles, the watershed covers the District of Columbia and six states: Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Bay itself is nearly 20 miles long and 35 miles wide, with a total shoreline of 11,684 miles, including its tributaries.

A complex ecosystem, the Bay is home to 3,700 species of plants and animals including rockfish, bald eagles, blue crab and oysters. Known for its abundant production of seafood, and an important link in this regions commerce, the Bay now suffers from diminishing production and is at risk from water quality degradation and loss of aquatic vegetation. As a result, the habitats for many of the bay's animal population are also depleting. The delicate balance of the entire bay ecosystem and watershed is at risk resulting in increased concerns from communities in the region.

Furthermore, the Chesapeake Bay remains an important tourism feature for the economies of the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. The restoration and protection of this waterway is vital not only for the obvious environmental reasons but for the impact on regional livelihood and identity.

It has been well-established for that the Bay suffers from a variety of sources of pollution. Chief amongst them are the nutrient and sediment runoff from the rich agricultural lands in the watershed. But deposition from cars and power-plants, stormwater from our rapidly growing communities, and nutrients and toxics from industry and wastewater treatment facilities are also major factors.

Additionally, wastewater treatment facilities contribute significantly in nutrient dumping into the Bay and its tributaries. It has also been discovered that new land developments are also causing an increase in nutrient and sediment loads at rates faster than restoration efforts can reduce them.

As early as this week, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration released a report stating that this year's blue crab population is even lower than last year's alarmingly low level. It states that the population of spawning-age blue crabs in the bay for 2007-2008 was 120 million. This is down from 143 million during the 2006-2007 season and highlights that the bay's signature species is in danger. Last year's take was 43.5 million pounds – the lowest level since 1945.

For the sake of our watermen, for the sake of the Bay's health, and for the sake of this region's identity, we must move forward in protecting and restoring the Bay. And we must do it better than we have in the past – because we are nowhere close to the level of success and sustainability that we should be. This is not to say that nothing has been done. But it is to say that much, much more needs to be achieved.

Since the 1980s the Federal government has been involved in Bay restoration activities. Largely through the Chesapeake Bay Program, the Federal government has invested sizable resources into the Bay. Our level of knowledge about the Bay – its ecosystems, its impairments, its tolerance for pollutants – is probably greater than for any other body of water in the country. And yet the Bay seems to suffer ever more from pollution. And in line with this, the habitat and living resources of the Bay become ever more degraded.

It has been 25 years since the Chesapeake Bay Agreement was first signed. Since that time, the EPA, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, the District of Columbia, as well as the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Delaware, New York, and West Virginia have worked hard towards improving conditions in the Bay. Given the length of time that the EPA and other parts of the Federal government have been trying to heal the bay, and given the amount of resources we have dedicated to it, we should have stronger indicators of success than we presently do.

It seems obvious to me that we need a new approach. I feel strongly that in lieu of intensive research initiatives, greater emphasis on implementing a plan that will actually restore the Bay is now needed.

As we all know, such goals are not easy to achieve and yield many questions. Through what mechanism will we provide increased funding for addressing our wastewater and stormwater infrastructure? How can we best address non-point source pollution from agricultural lands? What is the best approach for reducing airborne emissions that degrade our waters? And how do we work with our state and local partners to promote smart growth and development?

These are all questions we need to, and must, face. Obviously, what we as a policymakers put forth in a future reauthorization of the Chesapeake Bay Program will have significant ramifications on the future health of the Bay. As such, addressing these major drivers of Bay pollution will be challenging on a

variety of levels: political, policy, and fiscal. Nevertheless, it is my firm view that we must put aside our differences and work together to overcome any obstacles with a collective and united eye towards restoring a national treasure.

It is with this in mind that I would like to acknowledge one of my long-time colleagues on the committee, Congressman Gilchrest. Congressman Gilchrest has been a tireless advocate in his efforts to raise and focus our attention to the importance of protecting and restoring the Chesapeake. The people of this region can only hope that whoever his successor is, Republican or Democrat, that person will be as dedicated to restoring this precious body of water as Representative Gilchrest has been.