



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Full Committee Hearing:
Nature in Crisis: Biodiversity Loss and its Causes
Tuesday, June 4, 2019

Good morning. I would like to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses and thank them for joining us. Today we have the opportunity to discuss an issue that has captivated the attention of the public and policymakers alike, namely the alarming loss in biodiversity that is occurring world wide.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, or IPBES, recently published a summary for policymakers for its first ever Global Assessment Report. This intergovernmental body, which is not a part of the United Nations, set out to assess “the state of biodiversity, its ecosystems, and the essential services they provide to society.” This Global Assessment was prepared in advance of the upcoming U.N. Convention on Biodiversity scheduled for 2020.

I would like to note that while we are primarily discussing the findings of the summary for policymakers today, the draft chapters of the full report were recently made publicly available. The final report chapters will be released later this year, and they will not differ from the findings in the summary for policymakers we are discussing this morning.

The findings the IPBES laid out are too stark to ignore. The Global Assessment lays out five direct drivers of biodiversity loss in the following order from greatest to least impact (1) Changes in land and sea use (2) direct exploitation of organisms (3) climate change (4) pollution and (5) invasive species. Though there are many underlying causes for these direct drivers of change, it is very clear that humans have had an outsized impact on our surrounding environment.

We have already discussed the impacts that a changing climate is having on our oceans at an Environment Subcommittee hearing earlier this year, but climate change as a driver of biodiversity loss also impacts non-marine ecosystems. I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses about the real world impacts of all of the drivers of biodiversity loss.

Much of the reporting on the Global Assessment has focused on the devastating finding that almost one million species could potentially go extinct in the next few decades. But, we would be remiss if we did not discuss what else this report lays out, especially its recommendations for potential solutions and pathways to addressing biodiversity loss. I hope today's conversation with our witnesses will provide an opportunity to further illuminate potential solutions we can utilize to address the dangers highlighted in the Global Assessment.

Earlier this year I introduced the Energy-water nexus Act with my friend and colleague, Ranking Member Frank Lucas, to address issues related to water conservation and use in the process of the Department of Energy's research, development, and demonstration activities. Cross-cutting initiatives, like this bill, are clear examples of the role that Congress, and especially this Committee, can play in developing science-based solutions to our most pressing issues.

June is world oceans month, and this week in particular is Capitol Hill Oceans Week, or CHOW. I am delighted that we have Dr. Porter from the University of Georgia joining us today to discuss the impacts of the drivers of biodiversity loss laid out in the IPBES report on coral reefs and the numerous ecosystems services they provide.

Later today the Committee will be screening *Chasing Coral*, a film for which Dr. Porter was a scientific expert. This screening is free and open to the public and I encourage everyone to come back and watch the film. After the screening, Dr. Porter will host a question and answer session with the audience. I also want to let everyone know that this Thursday, June 6, the Committee will be hosting an Ocean Exploration Expo to showcase ocean exploration technologies. I again encourage members of the public, and any of my colleagues, to join this expo on Thursday. More information is available on our website. I would also like to welcome back Sir Robert Watson, who previously testified before our Committee over 20 years ago.

I am really looking forward to today's discussion to not only better understand the findings in the IPBES Global Assessment report, but also identify to knowledge gaps, understand how best to implement the transformative changes recommended, and determine our path forward with science-based solutions.

Thank you.