



HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
CLIMATE CRISIS

Opening Statement of Chair Kathy Castor
Hearing on “Turning the Tide for Ocean Climate Action:
Unleashing the Climate Benefits of Our Blue Planet”
June 9, 2022

As prepared for delivery

Happy National Ocean Month and Capitol Hill Ocean Week. As we celebrate the progress we’ve made to sustainably manage our ocean, our coasts, and our marine ecosystems, we must also look at additional policies and investments needed to conserve and restore them. I’m worried. We know climate change is impacting our ocean, leading to increases in water temperature, rising sea levels, acidification, deoxygenation, and changes in circulation. The climate crisis is an ocean crisis. Which means the ocean must be part of our national climate strategy – and we must invest in ocean-based climate solutions.

The ocean plays a crucial role in our global climate. It helps regulate temperatures, absorbs excess heat, and supports countless ecosystems. It also supports millions of jobs, including over 500,000 jobs in Florida alone. But the ocean is stressed out. It has absorbed between 20 and 30% of all human-caused carbon pollution since the 1980s. And it has absorbed more than 90% of excess heat since 1970. That’s why it’s crucial that we conserve sea grasses, mangroves, and other coastal habitats, which sequester more carbon per area than any terrestrial habitat. It’s crucial that we protect our coral reefs, which can mitigate the impacts of intense hurricanes, rising sea levels, and storm surge in places like Florida. And it’s crucial we conserve open ocean and deep-sea ecosystems, which may also be able to sequester carbon, according to emerging research.

We cannot stop there. Ocean climate action is also about harnessing offshore wind energy and emerging technologies, like wave and tidal power. These clean energy sources can help secure America’s energy independence, while reducing our dependence on costly fossil fuels. And they can help us meet our climate targets. According to research by the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, ocean-based climate solutions can help reduce heat-trapping pollution by nearly 4 billion tonnes per year by 2030 – and 11 billion tonnes per year by 2050. That’s more than the equivalent of shutting down every coal-fired power plant around the world.

As we unleash this potential, we must be proactive about restoring and conserving our ocean areas. That means investing in low-cost, big-impact solutions, like safeguarding marine and coastal habitats through well-implemented Marine Protected Areas. According to a recent study in *Science*, climate-fueled ocean warming could kill off one-third of all marine animals over the next 300 years. And according to a separate study, climate change could lead to 10% of fish species becoming extinct this century. These serious losses would harm coastal economies. And we’re already seeing some of these impacts in Florida. Just last year, a record number of

manatees died – many from starvation – as man-made pollution killed off much of the seagrass that manatees feed on. And in Tampa Bay, red tide killed more than 600 tons of marine life and fish last summer, leaving a rotten smell that took over parts of our coast.

The good news is we can mitigate these harms. And when it comes to ocean climate action, the Biden-Harris Administration has hit the ground running. President Biden made the ocean a central part of his early executive order on climate, increasing American coordination with international partners and pledging to protect at least 30% of our waters by 2030. He also tasked the Ocean Policy Committee with drafting a national Ocean Climate Action Plan, and he's committed to produce 30 Gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030.

We've also done our part in Congress. Through President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we invested over \$490 million to restore ecosystems and prevent flood damage in coastal communities; \$150 million to better gather data along our coasts, Great Lakes, and ocean; and \$490 million to improve NOAA's flood mapping, forecasting, and water modeling. Through our government funding legislation, we also invested \$33 million for NOAA's Coral Reef Program and \$16 million for its Ocean Acidification Program, as well as \$21.5 million to address harmful algal blooms. Finally, the House passed \$6 billion in reconciliation investments for coastal and marine habitat restoration, and we urge our Senate colleagues to include those investments as they finalize their reconciliation legislation.

It's time to turn the tide for ocean climate action. I look forward to today's discussion.