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NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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## Administration Dodges Questions on Obama's Ocean Zoning Plan, Witnesses Begrudge Lack of Public Participation, Potential Implications

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the Natural Resources Committee held the second [oversight hearing](#) in a series on, “*The President’s New National Ocean Policy - A Plan for Further Restrictions on Ocean, Coastal and Inland Activities.*” At the hearing, Members questioned the Administration about President Obama’s [Executive Order 13547](#) that imposed a mandatory ocean zoning initiative. A second panel of witnesses consisted of stakeholders concerned with the potential job and economic implications of the Executive Order.

*“Instead of getting input and statutory authorization from Congress, the Obama Administration has decided that the President’s signature alone is all that’s needed to make major changes to policies governing ocean activities and to create a huge new bureaucracy that will change the way inland, ocean and coastal activities will be managed. This could cost jobs and have devastating long-term economic impacts throughout the country. The Administration can and should require executive agencies to work in a more coordinated manner where ocean jurisdictions overlap. It is also clear that executive agencies with ocean jurisdiction should share information and reduce duplication between Federal agency actions. This would save money and could be supported by all of us. Yet, in addition to the lack of statutory authority, there are numerous other concerns and questions about the impacts of the Administration’s initiative that have still not been answered,”* **said Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04).**

Despite repeated requests by the Committee for the Administration to reveal what funds have been expended for this new National Ocean Policy, and to identify the specific statutory authorization that allows the Obama Administration to establish Regional Planning Bodies as well as implement mandatory ocean zoning, the information was again not provided.

At the hearing, the Administration continued to tout the mandatory ocean zoning initiative as a bottom-up, transparent process. **Nancy Sutley, Chair of the U.S. Council on Environmental Quality and Co-Chair of the National Ocean Council**, stated in her testimony, “*The National Ocean Policy also brings a broad range of stakeholders to the table to foster communication and transparency and better plan for the future.*” However, during questioning, Administration witnesses admitted that the nine Regional Planning Bodies and Governance Coordinating Committee created by the Executive Order are exempt from the Federal Advisory Committee Act – the very statute that requires transparency and public involvement in dealings with Federal agencies.

**Randall Luthi, President of the National Ocean Industries Association**, testified on the lack of

public involvement in the planning process. *“NOIA supports the concept of a national ocean policy, but believes that the present policy embodied in EO 13547 has been lacking in meaningful stakeholder involvement both in its development and implementation.”* According the Luthi, additional bureaucratic layers will only increase regulatory uncertainty, killing jobs and economic viability: *“NOIA believes there are ample policy and statutory tools to ensure that ocean resources are conserved and protected and that potential conflicts are managed without imposing a cumbersome new layer of federal bureaucracy upon an already time intensive and uncertain regulatory process. We believe it is difficult to move ahead with a process such as this while also expecting that companies are going to be in the position to restore lost jobs and add new ones.”*

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