



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

Opening Statement

**Chairwoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ)
of the Subcommittee on Environment**

Environment Subcommittee Hearing:
*Defining a National ‘Oceanshot’: Accelerating Ocean and Great Lakes Science
and Technology*

June 7, 2021

Good morning and welcome to today’s Environment Subcommittee hearing on “Defining a National ‘Oceanshot’: Accelerating Ocean and Great Lakes Science and Technology.” It is World Ocean Month, and in keeping with the theme, we are holding this hearing a day before World Ocean Day and Capitol Hill Ocean Week.

With the largest ocean property in the world, the United States is undoubtedly an ocean nation. My home state of New Jersey is a microcosm, with 80 percent of New Jerseyans living in coastal areas. The coastal New Jersey economy employs almost 3 million people annually, earning over \$188 billion.

The oceans are not just important to our coastal communities; they are important to our inland communities as well, as they sustain all life on our planet. The oceans regulate the Earth’s weather and climate system and sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere: oceans are a major part of the solution to the climate crisis. They also supply over half of the oxygen we breathe, provide a major source of protein for billions of people, and produce life-saving pharmaceuticals. Human health is inextricably tied to ocean health.

But ocean health is under siege. Climate change, ocean acidification, plastic pollution, overfishing, and other human activities are stressing our oceans. We need bold, ambitious, science-based solutions to these growing challenges. At today’s hearing, we are going to hear from experts on their perspectives on the science that is needed most urgently, but also what our longer-term vision should be.

We are at an important juncture for ocean science. This year marks the beginning of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. This is an opportunity for the United States to think outside the box and define a bold, ambitious vision for advancing ocean science and technology to address major challenges such as climate change. Simply put, we need a moonshot equivalent for the ocean; we need an “oceanshot.” As we discussed on this

Subcommittee last Congress, we have better maps of the moon and Mars than we have of our seafloor.

Two major challenges we face is the chronic underfunding of ocean science in the U.S. and around the world, and that ocean science suffers from a lack of diversity. Ocean science is the least diverse of all STEM fields, with Black students representing less than two percent of graduates. A March 2021 House Science Committee Majority Staff report found that less than four percent of NOAA scientists are Black, and only 1.3 percent are Black women.

Investing in ocean science and innovations presents significant economic opportunities as well. In the U.S., the goods and services provided by the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes, called the Blue Economy, is valued at \$373 billion. As this Administration and Congress look to Build Back Better, we have the opportunity to Build Back Bluer. Opportunities for expanding ocean science also mean opportunities for job creation.

I want to welcome our expert panel of witnesses today, who will provide perspectives on critical ocean science and technology from the federal, academic, non-profit, and philanthropic sectors. I look forward to hearing their ideas for how the U.S. should engage in transformative, bold ocean research to help society. We ultimately need a collective effort to build partnerships, collaboration, and cooperation to achieve desired science and conservation outcomes.

The oceans know no geopolitical boundaries and connect us all over the world. The U.S. should not only be the global leader in ocean science, but we should build international partnerships and scientific collaborations to increase our collective knowledge and global health.

Given that the ocean benefits us all, advancing ocean science and technology can and should be a bipartisan issue, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to support these issues in Congress.