FRED UPTON, MICHIGAN
CHAIRMAN

HENRY A. WAXMAN, CALIFORNIA
RANKING MEMBER

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515–6115

Majority (202) 225–2927
Minority (202) 225–3641

March 21, 2012

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ed Whitfield
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Chairman Whitfield:

While many are familiar with the scientific evidence that carbon dioxide emissions are responsible for climate change, fewer are aware of carbon dioxide's serious effects on our oceans. We are writing to urge you to hold a hearing on a new scientific study showing that the ocean is acidifying at an unprecedented rate due to rising emissions of carbon dioxide.

The world's oceans serve as sponges to absorb excess carbon dioxide. But when carbon dioxide enters the oceans too quickly, oceans can acidify, damaging sensitive marine ecosystems and species. According to the United Nations Environment Program, ocean acidification is "rapidly becoming a critical issue with the potential, if unabated, to affect many species and their ecosystems, pertinently including those associated with human food resources."[1]

Columbia University, the University of Bristol, and others recently examined the geologic record over the last 300 million years for evidence of significant periods of ocean acidification. The researchers concluded the current rate of ocean acidification is at least ten

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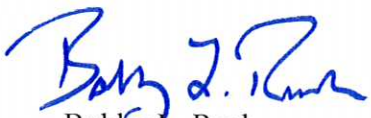
[1] United Nations Environment Program, *Environmental Consequences of Ocean Acidification: A Threat to Food Security* (2010).

times faster than at any other point in the Earth's history, including periods that led to major extinctions.[2] Professor Andy Ridgwell from the University of Bristol stated that the study suggests that "the current acidification is potentially unparalleled" and "raises the possibility that we are entering an unknown territory of marine ecosystem change."[3]

These findings underscore one of the potentially serious consequences of failing to act to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. We urge you to schedule a hearing on this matter as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member



Bobby L. Rush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Power

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[2] *The Geological Record of Ocean Acidification*, Science (Mar. 2, 2012); Columbia University, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, *Ocean Acidification Rate May Be Unprecedented, Study Says* (Mar. 1, 2012).

[3] University of Bristol, *Learning about the future from the past* (Mar. 2, 2012).