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N E W S R E L E A S E

For Details, Contact: Mike Dunmyer, Executive Director
Phone: 703-533-7571 Fax: 703-229-4103
Email: mike@oceanchampions.org

Ocean Champions Applauds Toxic Algae Hearing *House Energy & Environment Subcommittee Addresses Coastal Water Pollution*

Washington, D.C. – June 2, 2011 – Ocean Champions, which works to build political power for the oceans by helping to elect pro-ocean candidates to the U.S. Congress applauds the House Science and Technology Committee's Energy and Environment Subcommittee for today's hearing on the growing menace of harmful algal blooms (HABs) and oceanic dead zones.

In yesterday's hearing experts such as NOAA's Dr. Robert Magnien, EPA Gulf Ecology Division Director Dr. Richard Greene, and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute's Dr. Don Anderson presented subcommittee members with information about the economic, health and habitat risks posed by HABs. The panel also provided comments on draft legislation intended to "develop and coordinate a comprehensive strategy to address harmful algal blooms and hypoxia." While Ocean Champions has not seen the full text of the draft legislation, we are encouraged that the Committee is moving forward on a HABs bill based on the one passed in the House last year.

"This is a critical issue for coastal water quality that has been a priority of ours for several years," said David Wilmot, Ph.D., Ocean Champions' President and Co-Founder. "Today's Subcommittee Hearing showed that bipartisan support for addressing toxic algae still exists. We now look forward to working with our champions to help make this bill as strong as possible."

Harmful algal blooms (HABs), which often produce a toxin and occur in both salt and fresh water, kill fish, marine mammals, and birds; contaminate shellfish and harm human health, sometimes resulting in fatalities. They shut down fisheries, sideline fishermen and drive tourists away from resorts. Researchers estimate that HABs cost coastal communities nearly \$100 million annually. Recently, toxic algae have contributed to fish kills in Texas and the Chesapeake Bay, killed more than 10,000 seabirds off the Northwest coast, forced the closure of Maine's shellfish harvest from April to September, and contributed to record incidents of sea lion stranding along California's central coast.

Algal blooms can also cause oxygen to be stripped from the water resulting in "dead zones" where few if any marine animals can survive. These dead zones are increasing in size and number worldwide: 162 were identified in the 80s, 305 by 1995, and 405 in 2008. Closer to home, the massive dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico is expected to reach its largest size ever as a result of additional runoff from Mississippi River Basin flooding.

Ocean Champions is the only nonprofit political organization that endorses pro-ocean Congressional candidates and lobbies members of Congress on behalf of the oceans. To learn more about Ocean Champions or any of the candidates endorsed by Ocean Champions, visit www.oceanchampions.org.