

## [A SpacePolicyOnline.Com](http://SpacePolicyOnline.Com) Hearing Summary

FY2010 NOAA Budget  
Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee  
Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard Subcommittee  
June 11, 2009

Chair: Maria Cantwell (D-WA) ([opening statement](#))

Ranking Member: Olympia Snowe (R-ME) (not present at hearing)

### Witness

Jane Lubchenco, Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, and Administrator, NOAA ([prepared statement](#))

### Background

NOAA is part of the Department of Commerce and has six line offices: National Weather Service; National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service (NESDIS); National Marine Fisheries Service; National Ocean Service; Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research; and Office of Program Planning and Integration. Satellite activities are concentrated in NESDIS. The hearing covered the entire agency, but this summary reports only on issues concerning satellite programs.

The [FY2010 budget request for NESDIS](#) is \$1.4 billion, out of a total NOAA budget request of \$4.5 billion. The two major satellite programs are NOAA's Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES) system and the joint DOD-NOAA-NASA National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS). NPOESS is equally funded by DOD and NOAA, with DOD as the acquisition agent. NASA participates in a technology development role. A special Independent Review Team (IRT) chaired by former Lockheed Martin executive A. Thomas Young has made recommendations about how to address significant problems that have plagued the NPOESS program. The report had not been made public at the time of this hearing, but was a topic of questioning by Senator Cantwell. The [webcast](#) of the hearing is available on the committee's website.

### Nuggets

The IRT concluded that NPOESS has an "extraordinarily low probability of success and cannot be successfully executed within the constraints of cost, schedule and performance with the current management construct."

Senator Cantwell

"There is no final decision that is imminent" regarding NPOESS.

Dr. Lubchenco

## Hearing Highlights Related to Satellite Programs

The only discussion of satellite issues was a series of questions by Senator Cantwell about the status of administration discussions about the recommendations of the Independent Review Team (IRT) on NPOESS chaired by Tom Young. Dr. Lubchenco provided a few hints but no details of the IRT's recommendations. In her opening statement, she said that the IRT had "identified significant deficiencies in the program structure and its budgeting and cost estimating, indicating the program has a low probability of meeting the performance and satellite coverage requirements for weather and climate monitoring."

Senator Cantwell stated more strongly that the IRT concluded that NPOESS has an "extraordinarily low probability of success and cannot be successfully executed within the constraints of cost, schedule and performance with the current management construct." She asked how the administration would address these findings.

Dr. Lubchenco replied that this is one of her highest priorities and Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke also is keenly interested in finding a solution. She said the IRT's conclusions are "sobering" and discussions are ongoing among the three agencies and with the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to find a way forward. She characterized the discussions as "honest and straightforward." A number of options are on the table, but there is "no final decision that is imminent," according to her. She said she was more optimistic than when she began looking into these issues and the guidance in the IRT report is "invaluable."

Senator Cantwell called the IRT's assessment "pretty damning of the current process."

The following information could be gleaned about the IRT's conclusions from the discussion.

- The IRT has put four management options on the table and the partners in the program and OSTP are discussing the best way forward.
- Dr. John Holdren, Director of the OSTP, is the point man for deciding how to respond to the IRT.
- The IRT found that one of the agencies represented on the NPOESS Executive Committee does not, in fact, have authority to make decisions even though that is the purpose of the Executive Committee. NPOESS is managed by a tri-agency Integrated Program Office (IPO) with an Executive Committee composed of one representative from each agency (DOD, NOAA, NASA).

Senator Cantwell asked how priorities for the program would be determined. Dr. Lubchenco said that DOD's requirements are for weather data to support military operations, while NOAA's requirements are for data that feed into weather and climate, and the orbits required to meet those needs are different. She also said that DOD's requirements can be met by data of lower quality. According to Dr. Lubchenco, the IRT concluded, and she agrees, that for NPOESS to be a successful program it needs to meet the higher data quality requirements of NOAA to ensure continuity of climate data and for state-of-the-art information to inform weather forecasting.