

Opening Statement of Kristen J. Sarri
Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environmental
and Scientific Affairs
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 9, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Ricketts, and Members of the Committee for welcoming me today. It is a privilege to be considered by this Committee as the President's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, or OES for short.

I am grateful to President Biden for nominating me, and for the trust he and Secretary Blinken place in me. And, I am thrilled to have the chance to serve my country, if confirmed.

I want to thank Senator Reed for his support of my nomination and his encouragement throughout my career. His dedication to service, his commitment to improving the lives of others, and his work ethic serve as the model for me.

I am grateful to my family – Drew, Cathy, Antulio, Gabriela, and Alex -- who are a constant source of support and inspiration for me. And, to my mom and dad who instilled in me the value of public service and ignited my interest in protecting the environment, for both people and nature.

Finally, I want to thank Members of the Committee and their staffs for taking the time to meet with me. If I am confirmed, I look forward to continuing our conversations and strengthening the vital relationship between OES and this Committee.

Throughout my professional life, I have sought opportunities to promote community development, environmental stewardship, and job creation by building partnerships and working to strengthen the effectiveness of government. In each of my professional roles, I was fortunate to work with Members of Congress, their staffs and public officials who focused on how government should work best to serve the American people and support our economy and environment. I learned from them the value of strong bipartisan cooperation, developing practical solutions to problems, and gaining other perspectives when working to shape policy. It is these lessons and experiences that I carry with me and that shape my work.

Now is a critical time for international cooperation on environmental and scientific issues. Many of the challenges we face are global and require strong partnerships and alliances to address. If confirmed, my focus will be working on issues where OES leadership can have a strong impact for the American people, our allies and partners, and the planet. I would like to address three priority areas.

Pollution, of all types, harms human health, the environment, and economic growth. OES plays a vital role in developing foreign policy to protect our air, water, and land from pollution. One

pressing global issue is plastics. The international community is coming together to negotiate a new global agreement on combating plastic pollution. If confirmed, I would work with our federal domestic agencies, private and non-profit stakeholders, and other countries on a strong agreement to address the global threat of plastic pollution to people and the environment, and work to strengthen implementation of existing agreements and partnerships to prevent this and other types of pollution.

Nature provides critical resources that nourish us, improve our quality of life, and fuel community development. One million species could disappear in the next decade unless we act to conserve, protect, and restore ecosystems critical to human well-being. It is in our own interests and OES has a huge role to play.

Further, the ties between conservation and security are become increasingly clear. Loss of habitats and species increase the risk of conflict and instability. Nature crimes, such as illegal logging, mining, and wildlife trade, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, undermine the rule of law, and hinder our efforts to conserve species and their habitats and to protect human rights and public health. If confirmed, I will prioritize working with this Committee, Congress, and other federal agencies to advance policies that address nature crimes, protect environmental defenders, and help protect and restore natural ecosystems.

OES's work extends into the Earth's atmosphere and beyond. Space activities are essential to our way of life – from enhancing economic opportunity to helping us find our way home. Last year, Secretary Blinken released the first-ever Strategic Framework for Space Diplomacy to advance space cooperation. If confirmed, I would work to strengthen U.S. leadership in space to promote peaceful cooperation and its sustainable use in the future.

OES's strength is its people. They are experts in their fields and leaders on international efforts to conserve and restore the environment, build resilience to global challenges, and advance cooperation in science and space. The bureau's work is integral in achieving the United States' environmental, economic, and national security objectives. If confirmed, I would work with staff to continue this strong tradition, and I commit to maintaining strong lines of communication and cooperation between the OES, this Committee, and Congress.

Again, thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering your questions.