

**Testimony
For the Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

**Transparency in Environmental Protection and Climate Change in China
Roundtable**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to you today on the subject of transparency in environmental protection and climate change in China.

Pacific Environment is a U.S.-based NGO that protects the living environment of the Pacific Rim by promoting grassroots activism, strengthening communities, and reforming international policies. Our successes over the past 20-plus years stem from a deep and abiding trust that local people, armed with the right tools and solid support, are the best hope for protecting the world's environment. As such, we support the development of grassroots organizations, prioritize community-based advocacy, and leverage international resources in service of our local partners. Together with these grassroots advocates, we have protected tens of millions of acres of wilderness, spearheaded campaigns to protect endangered species, launched efforts to fight water pollution, reformed environmental and social standards for export credit agencies, and publicized critical environmental issues around the Pacific Rim. We support communities in China, Russia, Alaska and California to have a larger voice on the critical environmental issues that affect them, including climate change which increasingly impacts their livelihoods.

Pacific Environment has worked in China for over fifteen years, assisting local environmental organizations to grow a mature environmental movement that is effective at working together with the Chinese government to address the most pressing environmental issues affecting China's development path.

The majority of our work in China focuses on strengthening Chinese non-governmental organizations to address water pollution issues. The lessons we learned through these efforts have relevance to questions of transparency in environmental protection, and can also help us understand how to promote transparency in dealing with climate change issues in China.

One of China's most critical environmental problems is water pollution; In 2005, top Chinese governmental officials indicated that over 360 million rural Chinese lack access

to clean drinking water; over 70 percent of lakes and rivers are polluted; and major pollution incidents happen on a near daily basis.

Water pollution not only strains the environment, but also severely impacts public health. Today, China has an alarmingly growing cancer rate, with hundreds of “cancer villages” sprouting up near polluted water sources. The World Health Organization recently estimated that nearly 100,000 people die annually from water pollution-related illnesses in China, and 75 percent of disease comes from water quality issues.

China’s water pollution crisis made international headlines following a 2005 petro-chemical plant explosion which released 100 tons of benzene into the Songhua River, a major waterway in Heilongjiang Province and a water source for millions of people. Such spills are not rare in China, yet the accident and ensuing cover-up opened a new space for encouraging the Chinese government to change its approach to water pollution, specifically as it relates to public access to information, enforcement of pollution laws and accountability, and international information-sharing and cooperation.

Over the past several years, there has been a noticeable shift in behavior by the Chinese government as it pertains to environmental issues, particularly water pollution. Pan Yue, a Vice Minister of China’s Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), openly acknowledged that “the environmental crisis, particularly for water, is coming to China earlier than expected.”

Pacific Environment believes that improvements will only be successful and sustainable if local, regional and national environmental groups are able to establish themselves as stronger watchdogs of, and advocates to, the government and private industries.

Working with many partner environmental groups across China, Pacific Environment is reaching out to local communities concerned about water pollution and helping them to conduct legal, public relations, and advocacy campaigns to reduce the impacts of water pollution on public health and the local environment. Through these actions, our partners are playing a pivotal role to ensure clean water for China’s future.

Just as in the United States, China’s decades of economic and industrial growth have brought major environmental challenges, including pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and desertification. In response to these ecological challenges, a public environmental movement has emerged and grown.

China’s water crisis includes overall ecosystem degeneration and a lack of public access to clean drinking water. Despite strong national policies to address water pollution, lax implementation of these laws inhibits local progress. These policies can become successful and sustainable, however, especially if NGOs can establish themselves as resources and experts that assist regional environmental protection bureaus to monitor and report on water pollution. The time is especially ripe for this type of public involvement in the wake of the implementation of China’s environmental information disclosure law—a powerful tool for environmental groups to assist their communities in

accessing information on polluting enterprises and to ensure public participation in environmental decision making.

Using China's new Public Disclosure of Environmental Information law, groups can request pollution information from local enterprises and governments and achieve water quality improvements at the local level by using this information to ensure that polluters are accountable to the law and to local communities. This strategy helps communities to understand issues related to water pollution and engages them in local environmental issues. It also ensures that those working for pollution reductions are involved directly in local ecological and public health improvements and that they are accountable to local communities. Over time, increased public participation in pollution monitoring will result in governmental action to enforce pollution control and improve water quality.

The Public Disclosure of Environmental Information Law is, in many ways, similar to the U.S. Freedom of Information Act. Just like the Freedom of Information Act, it will take time for Chinese government agencies to learn how to fully implement the law. Last year, when a partner organization in China requested information from a local environmental protection bureau, they were told that the time was not right to provide information due to the economic crisis. However our partner used the opportunity to build closer relations with the local government agency and since has been invited by local government officials to participate in pollution monitoring.

In the United States, years of precedent-setting litigation was required to ensure quality implementation of the Freedom of Information Act. While our partners hope that litigation is not required within China, they recognize that it will take time and patience to encourage the release of environmentally relevant information to the public. We are already seeing progress. Public transparency of environmental information within China is a critical step toward ensuring public trust in government information.

In one important model, the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE) in China has made great progress using open government data to publicize pollution sources through a National Water Pollution Map. IPE then works collaboratively with business, government, and local NGO representatives to encourage third-party audits of polluting factories that can make recommendations for pollution reduction. This model demonstrates how Chinese civil society can use publicly available information produced by the government to achieve environmental progress. IPE has now expanded its model to tackle air pollution, with evident applications within a climate change context.

How can the lessons learned from civil society's efforts against water pollution in China be applied to climate change issues? We believe that public transparency of environmental information is a critical underlying component to appropriate and effective measurement, reporting, and verification of climate change mitigation efforts.

Just like the United States, China has the potential to either make the climate crisis more severe, or lead the world in finding solutions. As in the United States, climate change is impacting the people of China with increasingly erratic and severe weather patterns that

create environmental and economic damage and reduce the amount of arable land. A significant portion of China's greenhouse gas emissions comes from major industrial development, which in turn pollutes waterways, dirties the air, and ruins ecosystems; these externalities are ultimately being paid by Chinese citizens.

China's central government has made encouraging statements about reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The National Development and Reform Commission stated that China aims to "integrate energy conservation, environmental protection, and control of greenhouse gas emissions into regional economic development." Despite such central government commitments, valid concerns remain about what actions are being taken at the local level to address climate change. To be effective, measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions must be implemented both centrally and provincially.

Pacific Environment believes that a critical part of working with China on climate change issues is empowering China's civil society and environmental organizations. With the right information and tools, communities throughout China can advocate for better energy choices. Civil society organizations can encourage provincial and industrial leaders to reduce greenhouse gas and other pollutant emissions.

In the United States, actions at the local and state levels have been remarkably successful in developing greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategies. Indeed, the shift toward local and state-level strategies represented an enormous break-through in the United States from shifting awareness to action on climate change issues. In China, provincial-level strategies also have the potential to build local action around as-yet unimplemented central government policies.

During the Copenhagen negotiations in December 2009, concerns were raised about China's willingness to accept measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) requirements suggested by developed countries, including the U.S. These concerns were raised out of a fundamental lack of trust in official government statistics and action in China. These concerns are real and must be addressed. However, China also raised valid concerns about how international MRV requirements can become an intrusion on its own sovereign rights.

A different approach to MRV is to strengthen multiple systems within China that will verify data and information. A critical component to a healthy MRV system anywhere in the world is a healthy and independent civil society sector. A healthy and independent civil society sector can help ensure that the government provides and acts upon accurate information. A healthy and independent civil society sector within China is compatible with China's sovereign interests; indeed, the organizations with which we partner are very interested in collaborating with all levels of government to find environmental solutions.

Historically, both the United States and China have lacked credibility in international climate change negotiations. However, it is clear that we can make the most progress in mitigating climate change if both the U.S. and China lead by example within their own

countries to set a high standard that other countries can meet. This can help build each country's international credibility and together we can work to save our planet from the climate crisis.

As we have heard today, China is emerging as a leader in clean energy production. China also needs to voluntarily ramp up its coal reduction measures and address short-lived climate forcers, if it is to both provide significant health and economic benefits to its population and combat climate change.

The key to mitigating the threat of climate change in China and around the world is to help China develop an independent civil society that will support the government in MRV, ensure that national environmental regulations are implemented locally, and improve the availability, credibility, and transparency of environmental information overall.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on the important subject of transparency in environmental protection and climate change in China.