

TRoubLED WATERS: A CALL FOR ACTION

We, the undersigned marine scientists and conservation biologists, call upon the world's citizens and governments to recognize that the living sea is in trouble and to take decisive action. We must act quickly to stop further severe, irreversible damage to the sea's biological diversity and integrity.

Marine ecosystems are home to many phyla that live nowhere else. As vital components of our planet's life support systems, they protect shorelines from flooding, break down wastes, moderate climate and maintain a breathable atmosphere. Marine species provide a livelihood for millions of people, food, medicines, raw materials and recreation for billions, and are intrinsically important.

Life in the world's estuaries, coastal waters, enclosed seas and oceans is increasingly threatened by: 1) overexploitation of species, 2) physical alteration of ecosystems, 3) pollution, 4) introduction of alien species, and 5) global atmospheric change. Scientists have documented the extinction of marine species, disappearance of ecosystems and loss of resources worth billions of dollars. Overfishing has eliminated all but a handful of California's white abalones. Swordfish fisheries have collapsed as more boats armed with better technology chase ever fewer fish. Northern right whales have not recovered six decades after their exploitation supposedly ceased. Steller sea lion populations have dwindled as fishing for their food has intensified. Cyanide and dynamite fishing are destroying the world's richest coral reefs. Bottom trawling is scouring continental shelf seabeds from the poles to the tropics. Mangrove forests are vanishing. Logging and farming on hillsides are exposing soils to rains that wash silt into the sea, killing kelps and reef corals. Nutrients from sewage and toxic chemicals from industry are overnourishing and poisoning estuaries, coastal waters and enclosed seas. Millions of seabirds have been oiled, drowned by longlines, and deprived of nesting beaches by development and nest-robbing cats and rats. Alien species introduced intentionally or as stowaways in ships' ballast tanks have become dominant species in marine ecosystems around the world. Reef corals are succumbing to diseases or undergoing mass bleaching in many places. There is no doubt that the sea's biological diversity and integrity are in trouble.

To reverse this trend and avert even more widespread harm to marine species and ecosystems, we urge citizens and governments worldwide to take the following five steps:

- 1) Identify and provide effective protection to all populations of marine species that are significantly depleted or declining, take all measures necessary to allow their recovery, minimize bycatch, end all subsidies that encourage overfishing and ensure that use of marine species is sustainable in perpetuity.
- 2) Increase the number and effectiveness of marine protected areas so that 20% of Exclusive Economic Zones and the High Seas are protected from threats by the Year 2020.
- 3) Ameliorate or stop fishing methods that undermine sustainability by harming the habitats of economically valuable marine species and the species they use for food and shelter.
- 4) Stop physical alteration of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems that harms the sea, minimize pollution discharged at sea or entering the sea from the land, curtail introduction of alien marine species and prevent further atmospheric changes that threaten marine species and ecosystems.
- 5) Provide sufficient resources to encourage natural and social scientists to undertake marine conservation biology research needed to protect, restore and sustainably use life in the sea.

Nothing happening on Earth threatens our security more than the destruction of our living systems. The situation is so serious that leaders and citizens cannot afford to wait even a decade to make major progress toward these goals. To maintain, restore and sustainably use the sea's biological diversity and the essential products and services that it provides, we must act now.

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