

Emergency Oceans Rescue Plan

Executive Summary

Our oceans give us life – they provide us with oxygen and food, and they contain over 80% of all life on Earth. In exchange, we plunder them of fish, choke them with pollution and heat them with climate change. As a result of industrial fishing in the last 60 years, 90% of the oceans' large predatory fish, such as tuna, swordfish, marlin and sharks, have been taken from our oceans. We are only beginning to understand the full extent of the impacts our actions have. As climate change causes sea ice in our polar oceans to melt and air pollution increases the acidity of our oceans, the degradation of our oceans is gathering pace.

However, our ocean crisis can - and must - be reversed by setting aside areas of oceans as marine reserves, areas off-limits to fishing and other industrial activities, like wildlife parks at sea. In 2006, Greenpeace presented a bold vision for the world community - a proposal for a global network of marine reserves covering 40% of the oceans. Since then, world leaders have failed to make significant progress, despite international commitments under the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to create this network by 2012. The condition of our oceans has continued to worsen; today less than 1% of them are protected as marine reserves.

This year - the United Nations' International Year of Biodiversity - presents a unique opportunity to turn the tide of increasing destruction. Policymakers around the world will meet in October at the 10th Conference of the Parties of the CBD in Japan. Greenpeace is urging leaders at the CBD to make a global network of marine reserves a reality and put into action the steps laid out in our *Emergency Oceans Rescue Plan*.

The Mediterranean

One of the most diverse and complex ocean environments, the Mediterranean contains much more marine life than its size would suggest. Overfishing, fossil fuel extraction and the gross mismanagement of these waters have resulted in a Mediterranean Sea that is a shadow of its former self. The most visible example of mismanagement is with Atlantic bluefin tuna, which spawns here every year. Mediterranean bluefin stocks have been so depleted that the species is literally at the point of near extinction, yet in spite of this quotas are consistently set above scientific recommendations. Governments in the area have pledged, through the Barcelona Convention (BARCON), to create a protected area network by 2012 to meet the CBD target. Greenpeace is recommending that the BARCON nations set aside key spawning grounds, including the waters surrounding the Balearic Islands and in the Sicilian Channel, as part of a regional network in order to help maintain a healthy, living Mediterranean Sea. In addition, Greenpeace is urging Mediterranean governments to enhance the BARCON process, integrating local and regional marine protection efforts, as well as cooperation between fisheries management organisations and marine protection bodies.

The Pacific

Over half of the world's tuna comes from the Pacific but even this vast ocean is under threat. There is growing evidence of rapidly decreasing fish populations. Foreign fleets take 80% of the Pacific tuna, many taking advantage of the ocean's large size to avoid monitoring and control. Scientific assessments have shown a steady decline in recent years in a species that is key to the survival of the Pacific Island peoples and their economies. Greenpeace has been working with Pacific Island governments to establish better fisheries management - and there has been significant progress in recent years. The establishment of the Nauru Agreement just recently set aside over 1.2 million square kilometres of the Pacific to be free from purse seine fishing. Greenpeace has identified four key areas of international waters that lie between national waters of island nations; these must be set aside as marine reserves if these island communities are going to have fish - for food and for jobs - in the future. Greenpeace is also demanding better monitoring of foreign fishing vessels, as well as a stricter enforcement of quotas.

The Southern Ocean

Its remoteness has not spared this sea of serious impacts. Accelerating climate change is already having profound effects; it has altered the extent of the winter sea ice in some areas and has led to a reduction in krill, with knock-on effects for other species. Japan's whaling fleet recklessly hunts whales each year in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, and industrial fishing fleets are travelling to these far-away waters to take Antarctic fish. Antarctic and Patagonian toothfish, known to many as Chilean seabass, are aggressively being fished; their disappearance could impact the Antarctic food chain as seals and whales rely on these fish as food. As the least disturbed oceanic ecosystem on Earth, the Ross Sea is clearly a priority for protection as a marine reserve.

The Arctic

At the other pole, the Arctic Ocean is also coming under increasing pressure. Climate change has caused sea ice to melt quicker, opening these icy waters to northward-advancing fishing fleets, as Greenpeace has documented. CO₂ pollution from other parts of the world is also increasing the acidification of the Arctic Ocean. This could spell disaster for the vulnerable marine ecosystem, impacting species at the base of the food chain. The fishing industry is not alone in setting its sights on Arctic waters - the energy sector is intent on extracting the fossil fuels that lie beneath the Arctic ice, and governments regularly debate the sovereignty and drilling rights for the Arctic shelf. Greenpeace is demanding that, with so little known about the highly vulnerable Arctic Ocean ecosystem, a moratorium should be implemented on all industrial activities in the area that has been historically covered by sea ice. At the same time, governments have to create an overarching system to govern this ocean. The protection of this near-pristine ocean environment, and the people who depend on it, has to be at its core.

The creation of an effective global network of marine reserves does not only require cooperative action on the high seas. Countries must also act in their national waters, establishing comprehensive and representative networks of smaller marine reserves. In doing so, we will help our oceans and the wildlife in them recover, enable the millions dependent on them for food to survive, maintain a sustainable fishing industry, help alleviate the impacts of climate change and create a better future for life on our blue planet.

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