



U.S. Must Act Immediately and Decisively on National Oceans Report, Says NRDC

From Natural Resources Defense Council
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Blue Ribbon Panel Finds Grave Threats; Calls for Urgent Action to Protect Marine Life

WASHINGTON (April 19, 2004) - A new federal report reflects a broad consensus that the United States must take immediate steps to protect the ocean, according to NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council). Many of the findings of the [U.S. Oceans Commission](#), which was appointed by the president and Congress, coincide with those of the independent Pew Oceans Commission report released last year. Both reports conclude that overfishing and poorly coordinated management have helped trigger the collapse of commercial fisheries and the marine systems that sustain them.

"This is a call to action," said NRDC President John Adams, who served on the Pew Oceans Commission. "The White House and Congress must seize the opportunity to craft a new ocean management system while consensus is strong. Two blue ribbon panels have reached unprecedented agreement about the magnitude and gravity of the threat to our oceans and the need for comprehensive reforms before it's too late."

The 16-member U.S. Oceans Commission, which began researching the problem three years ago, is scheduled to release its draft report tomorrow to the governors of coastal states. The governors will have 30 days to comment before the commission finalizes its recommendations.

Like the June 2003 Pew report, the U.S. Oceans Commission report notes that once bountiful fish populations have been ravaged by overfishing, habitat destruction, mismanagement, coastal development, and coastal pollution from agricultural and chemical runoff. Overfishing is especially a problem. Government scientists report that a third of all the commercial fish species they have studied so far have been overfished.

"Fortunately there are steps we can take to turn the tide," said Dr. Daniel Pauly, a leading fisheries scientist, NRDC trustee and director of the University of British Columbia's Fisheries Centre. "We can do a much better job of protecting fish populations, for example, by limiting catch levels based on science, and safeguarding fish nursery areas and vulnerable sea bottom habitats from harmful fishing practices like bottom trawling."

Congress should heed recommendations to pass a national ocean policy act, said Adams. U.S. ocean policy currently is regulated by more than a dozen federal agencies and 140 laws, a piecemeal approach that both the Pew Commission and U.S. Oceans Commission conclude is not working.

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"The ocean is a vast, mysterious frontier, but it's not without its limits," said Jean-Michel Cousteau, president of Ocean Futures Society. "It would be a tragic footnote to 21st Century history if we were to turn our backs on sea life as we begin our search for evidence of life on Mars and other planets."

The [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has more than 1 million members and e-activists nationwide, served from offices in New York, Washington, Santa Monica and San Francisco.

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Sarah Chasis

NRDC senior attorney
Natural Resources Defense Council

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