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UNESCO Oceans Conference Underway in Paris

Ken Coons

55 nations have sent environment ministers and oceans experts to a meeting this week in Paris, convened by UNESCO. The group will assess the health of the world's oceans and coasts, nearly 10 years after a key meeting on the environment in Rio. The findings of the group which are sure to be alarming, will be presented at next September's World Summit on Sustainable Development, also sponsored by the UN, to be held in Johannesburg.

This Paris conference titled, Global Conference on Oceans and Coasts, will deal with rising sea levels, overfishing, coastal pollution and a rapidly growing shortage of potable water. The UN now estimates that two thirds of the world's population lives forty miles or less from the coast.

UPI reports that Iceland's Minister of Fisheries, Stefan Asmundsson, said, 'I certainly hope that in the aftermath of Sept. 11 and Afghanistan, the United States will realize it has to take part in all these discussions and be with us—that is us, the rest of the world—in trying to deal with these problems.' He was particularly referring to global warming and the decision by the Bush administration not to sign the Kyoto Agreement.

The World Wildlife Fund issued a statement calling for an end to what it calls a 'piecemeal' approach to fisheries management. WWF said that according to the FAO, the demand for fish has been growing at twice the population growth for the past 40 years.

If this trend continues, WWF believes that the entire ocean ecosystem could be irreversibly damaged. For example, WWF says that unregulated trawling fleets are decimating sea-mounts found in the high-seas, petroleum companies continue to violate vulnerable marine protected areas, and human-induced climate change is threatening coral reefs around the world. WWF believes these activities are putting at risk the future of the world's fisheries, coastal communities and the entire marine environment. The WWF also put in a pitch for wider adoption of the Marine Stewardship Council's approach to use market forces to encourage sustainable fishing practices.

The recent Canadian research that indicates global fish catch, as reported by FAO, has actually been declining in recent years because of bogus data submitted by China adds urgency to the fisheries part of the deliberations.