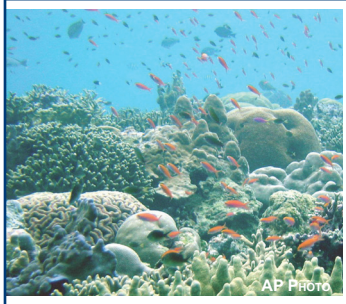
Protecting The Health Of The Ocean: A Worldwide Challenge



"Just as we share a common dependence on the ocean, we must join together in a common endeavor to save the ocean from damage caused by humans."

– Secretary of State John Kerry

The ocean covers almost three quarters of our planet and is critical to maintaining life on earth. No matter where people live, they depend on the ocean for the food they eat and the air they breathe.

The ocean:

- Regulates climate and weather
- Generates 50 per cent of the oxygen we breathe
- Absorbs excess carbon
- Provides food and a source of income for millions of people

Ocean Degradation

The ocean is at grave risk due to human activity. Challenges include:

- Overfishing
- Garbage patches
- Dead zones
- Ocean acidification

The causes of ocean degradation are clear – and so are the actions needed to restore the ocean's health. The United States has begun to restore fish stocks and reduce the flow of waste into the marine environment and has launched intensive studies on the effects of rising acidity levels on sea life. Around the world, other governments and partners are addressing the challenges in innovative ways. We can do more.

In June 2014, the U.S. Department of State convened the *Our Ocean Conference*, bringing together heads of state and foreign ministers, scientists, environmentalists, and business leaders to discuss the state of the ocean, the steps that should be taken to improve it, and solutions to chart the path forward.

Sustainable Fisheries

Many of the world's fish stocks are depleted. Overfishing, harmful fishing practices, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing harm the ecology of the ocean and reduce the long term potential of fish stocks to provide food and jobs. Seabirds, marine mammals, and sea turtles can also be hurt.

Marine Pollution

An estimated 80 per cent of marine pollution originates on land – pollutants that threaten wildlife and the health and safety of humans. Nutrients, coming from sources such as agricultural runoff, sewage and wastewater discharges, create "dead zones" where fish and other marine life cannot thrive. There are an estimated 500 dead zones in the world.

Marine debris, such as trash and other solid material, enter ocean and coastal waters and threaten wildlife and the health and safety of humans. Plastics consistently make up a significant portion of all marine debris. We can combat the marine debris problem through proper collection, handling and recycling or disposal of trash, as well as by reducing consumption and packaging.

Ocean Acidification

As the ocean absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, it becomes more acidic. Many marine organisms are unable to adapt to the new conditions. Today, the ocean is 30 per cent more acidic than it was before the Industrial Revolution. And, the chemistry of the ocean is changing ten times faster than at any other time in the past 50 million years.

Tackling the Challenge

Effectively responding to these challenges requires innovation, cooperation and action among governments, NGOs, industry, and other stakeholders. Working together, we will marshal the solutions we have today and create new solutions for tomorrow.