



Florida Needs a Healthy Oceans Act

We depend on the ocean for food, recreation, and jobs, but now pollution, overexploitation, and habitat degradation are pushing the world's oceans into a silent state of collapse. In Florida, ocean deterioration has led to beach closings, dying reefs, fewer fish for commercial and recreational fishing, and dangerous chemicals in some of the state's seafood. Fortunately, solutions are available that can help revive the world's oceans, starting with passing a national Healthy Oceans Act.

A national ocean protection strategy will reduce pollution and protect ocean habitats so that beaches are cleaner and fish and other ocean animals more abundant around the country—and in our own backyard. Florida is already seeing firsthand the effects of inaction on our seas:

Polluted coasts. Pollution-related closings and health advisories at U.S. beaches are increasing, with more than 25,000 days of closings and advisories in 2006.¹ 285 days of those beach closings and advisories were at Florida beaches. Florida's coastal tourism was worth more than \$37 billion in 2006, and we need to keep our beaches healthy and open for business.² Individual ocean species have been harmed as well: Elkhorn coral, recently added to the U.S. endangered species list, has been decimated by white pox disease caused by bacteria commonly found in sewage.

Red tide and algal blooms. Researchers at the University of Miami have determined that harmful red tides are occurring with greater frequency, closer to shore, and during more months of the

year. They attribute this phenomenon to greater inputs of nutrients into coastal waters. Algae associated with red tide can not only produce a toxin that can kill fish, birds, and marine mammals such as Florida's dolphins and manatees, but can also cause serious human health problems such as skin and respiratory irritations and short-term memory loss. Coral reefs off southeast Florida have experienced an unprecedented succession of macroalgal blooms since 1990, along with invasive species that threaten the area's economically important reef resources.³

Contaminated seafood. Florida's entire coastline is subject to mercury consumption advisories, which have been issued for popular fish such as flounder, spotted sea trout, snook, gag grouper,

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redfish, cobia, pompano, and king mackerel. Tests by the *Mobile Register* newspaper found methylmercury in several Gulf species, including redfish and amberjack, at levels so high that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration would prohibit selling them to the public.⁴

Disappearing wetlands. Between 1780 and 1980, the United States, excluding Alaska, lost more than half of its original wetlands, taking with it critical marine habitat and natural buffers to pollution, erosion, and storm and flood damage.⁵ A study by the *St. Petersburg Times* showed Florida has lost 84,000 acres of wetlands to development since 1990. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approves more permits to destroy wetlands in Florida than any other state.⁶

Florida Needs a Federal Healthy Oceans Act

Polluted coasts, red tide, contaminated seafood, disappearing wetlands: these are serious problems that significantly damage our state's ecology, economy, and way of life. The longer we wait to fix these problems, the harder and more expensive it will be to turn them around.

The current patchwork of laws and governance has failed to safeguard our oceans. Confusion and inaction reign, with approximately 140 different laws—each with diverging goals and conflicting mandates—pertaining to the management of the oceans and our nation's coasts.

The federal government manages our oceans and coasts without a basic vision to ensure that our oceans stay healthy and productive. That's why we need a national Healthy Oceans Act now. This federal law would establish the fundamental vision and game plan necessary to reduce pollution and protect ocean habitats so that beaches stay clean, and fish and other ocean animals can thrive.



We need a law that will:

- **Establish a national policy to protect and restore our oceans** in order to safeguard the economic, cultural, recreational, and other benefits that healthy oceans provide. We have a Clean Water Act and a Clean Air Act, but the United States has not yet made a similar commitment to protect oceans.
- **Provide federal leadership and funding to protect and restore ocean life.** There's currently no single lead agency coordinating national efforts to protect oceans.
- **Coordinate federal, regional, and state work to protect and restore ocean health.** We must ensure that regional problems and priorities inform and drive a coordinated drive to protect and restore ocean health.

How You Can Help

Together, we have the power to protect and restore our oceans. Ask your members of Congress to support healthy oceans and help preserve Florida's ocean and shore for the future. You can visit www.youroceans.org for more information.

¹ NRDC. Testing the Waters. 2007. Accessed 21 Feb. 2008. <http://www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/ttw/ttw2007.pdf>

² National Ocean Economics Program. Coastal Economy Data. Accessed 22 Feb. 2008. <http://noep.mbari.org/Market/coastal/coastalEcon.asp>.

³ NRDC. Testing the Waters. 2007. Accessed 21 Feb. 2008. <http://www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/ttw/ttw2007.pdf>

⁴ NRDC et al. 2006. Florida's Coastal and Ocean Future: A Blueprint for Economic and Environmental Leadership. 9-10.

⁵ Pew Oceans Commission. 2003. America's Living Oceans: Charting a Course for Sea Change. 56.

⁶ NRDC et al. 2006. Florida's Coastal and Ocean Future: A Blueprint for Economic and Environmental Leadership. 9-10.