

Support A Healthy Oceans Act

THE NEED FOR ACTION

Our oceans – significant values, significant threats

We expect so much from our nation's oceans, from the seafood we eat to our annual beach vacations to the \$117 billion economy the oceans support. Unfortunately the health of marine systems that support these activities face a variety of threats, from impacts on land and in the water.

These threats – including pollution, poorly planned coastal development, habitat degradation, invasive species, and unsustainable fishing levels and practices, have taken a significant toll. Scientists have already observed the diminished ability of our oceans to provide basic services – such as maintaining fish populations and water quality – and to recover from change, including the anticipated effects of global climate change and ocean acidification.

Current approach to ocean management cannot meet the challenge

Our oceans are managed under 140 different laws, implemented by 20 federal agencies, without an overarching vision or coordinated implementation of that vision. While these laws are important, each is targeted to an individual goal, resource or area and the implementation of one is largely disjointed from the implementation of the next. The basic problem is clear: we are currently only managing the details, but not the big picture.

Our oceans, and the economies and communities they support, deserve better. Addressing this clear gap was the major recommendation of two recent reports, one issued by the independent Pew Oceans Commission and the other by the congressionally established, presidentially appointed US Commission on Ocean Policy.

THE SOLUTION: A NATIONAL HEALTHY OCEANS ACT

We need a Healthy Oceans Act to provide the necessary tools for the government to make smarter decisions about the actions it takes. Such a bill would do this by establishing a national ocean vision, providing a way to implement that vision at the federal and regional levels, and putting in place the leaders and funding to do it. Specifically, it would provide:

- ***A vision:*** Establish a national ocean policy to protect, maintain and restore the health of ocean ecosystems and requires that each agency administer U.S. policies and laws to the fullest extent possible consistent with this policy. This type of approach is critical to ensure that maintaining and promoting ocean health and value is factored into agency decisions that affect the oceans.
- ***Strengthened leadership and coordination at the Federal level:*** Codify the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as the lead Federal, civilian ocean agency with responsibility for coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes. NOAA was established by executive order in 1970 and has never had a legislatively defined or stable purpose or structure. Also, establish a National Oceans Advisor to the President and an interagency Committee on Ocean Policy to improve coordination and strengthen leadership around a common vision of ocean ecosystem health.
- ***Regional solutions and improved coordination across levels of government:*** Establish Regional Ocean Partnerships around the country to promote ecosystem-based management and coordination among Federal, State and Tribal governments around the goals of ocean ecosystem health.
- ***Funding:*** Establish an "Ocean and Great Lakes Conservation Trust Fund" as a permanent funding source for State and Federal activities related to developing and implementing Regional Ocean Strategic Plans.