

ECOWATCH

Can we halt the tides of change in our oceans?

■ BY DELORES SAVAS

"Oceans are not mere bodies of water, they are the source of life on Earth, they are the source of oxygen for us. The time has come to protect and save them."
Global Ocean Treaty

This year the United Nations hosted a celebration of the annual World Oceans Day on June 8, using that title as its theme for the special day.

In 1992, the concept for what was then called a World Ocean Day was proposed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro to celebrate our world's shared oceans and our personal connection to the sea, as well as to raise awareness about the crucial role the oceans play on our life and the important ways people can help protect them.

Now the alarming decline of healthy oceans throughout the world has finally caused many scientists and oceanographers to raise the distress flag, warning people throughout the world that they are in harm's way if the oceans continue to change for the worse.

This scenario of oceans in distress has, for many years, been basically ignored by many. Lawmakers, corporations and scientists who worked for major corporations downplayed climate change warnings as groundless.

It was as early as 1896 that the warming trend and the depletion of the atmosphere's ozone layer became increasingly prominent in the international public debate and political agenda. But too many times the warnings were met with disbelief and ridicule and were ignored.

Now, studies have shown that climate change is for real, causing global temperatures to rise. The oceans are getting warmer, which will cause new hurricanes to be born. The great ice sheets are melting and the sealevel is rising. Florida's coasts are predicted to rise by as much as four feet within the next hundred years.



Many say it will happen sooner. Is it too late to backpedal? Time will tell.

Is it also too late to save the seven oceans of the world that cover 71 percent of Earth's surface? Many say it is a race against time.

An article in the Financial Daily entitled "Will the ocean really be lifeless in 50 years?" stresses the need to protect our oceans. "We all rely on the ocean, whether we know it or not. Earth's vast expanses of water are vital to the success of all life on Earth. We eat fish from the ocean, we breathe the oxygen it gives off, we feel the warmth of its huge currents.

"Without a healthy ocean, humans could not live. Life underwater would still be struggling to deal with climate change. Warm water holds less oxygen, which is a large problem for marine animals, as they must swim closer to the surface to reach oxygen. Warm water decreases an ecosystem's productivity. Even aside from climate change, we have been overfishing for a long time, too. Pollution will only add to the devastation unless we stop it."

Some points of interest that must concern everyone who lives on this planet are:

- The oceans influence and regulate Earth's climate, acting like the planet's heart.
- There is enough salt in the oceans to cover the whole surface of the earth.
- Less than 10 percent of the world's oceans, and less than 50 percent of U.S. waters, have been mapped.
- Sealevel and the amount of water in the ocean change over time.
- The number of species that live in the oceans is unknown.
- The Great lakes are not oceans, but they are similar in many ways.
- Some of the largest mass extinctions of life have taken place in the oceans.
- It has been predicted that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans.
- By 2050, sealevel along contiguous U.S. coastlines could rise as much as 10 to 12 inches above today's waterline, according to researchers at the National Ocean Serv-

ice, who analyzed nearly three decades of satellite observations as of Nov. 15 of last year.

There are other serious problems affecting the survival of oceans throughout the world. Greenpeace, which has been one of the organizations attempting to protect the oceans, has been protesting against deep-sea mining, the latest threat to our oceans. They claim that "mining companies are rapidly advancing exploration activities and developing technologies to drill for rare minerals used in batteries for cars and hi-tech products, without so much as a care for the long-term impact of their activities."

The threat of deep-sea mining is still on the horizon, but the increasing demand for electric vehicles like Ford's new electric pickup truck bolsters the hopes of the deep-sea mining industry.

Whales and other creatures of the oceans depend on echolocation and other forms of sonic mapping to communicate with each other, navigate, find mates and food, defend their territories and avoid predators. Fish and invertebrates also use sound for basic life functions.

Reports have shown that the use of giant drills in monitoring of the ocean bottoms has deafened whales and dolphins. Now a host of companies have joined in the ransacking of ocean minerals at the cost of the ocean dwellers and their environment. Go to info@greenpeaceusa.org for more information.

The warning from experts is on the table. If the deterioration of all seven oceans continues, there will be a steep price to pay. We have long ignored the warnings on climate change and are now seeing the consequences. Will it be the same for the warnings of the disaster that could devastate the oceans and their inhabitants?

Hopefully, the tides will change in our favor.

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