

'Oceans 21'

By Sam Farr, Member of Congress

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Don't be surprised if you see a member of Congress looking a little wet behind the ears these days: we're celebrating Capitol Hill Ocean Week here in Washington. We may be 100 miles from the ocean, but Congress still gets into the spirit. More importantly, this is a fantastic opportunity for me to expose my fellow members of Congress to some Santa Cruz values and let them know just how vital it is that we protect our oceans.

This will be the seventh year we've celebrated Ocean Week, and we'll be celebrating World Oceans Day on June 8. Every year we take these opportunities to reach more and more people with a message of conservation and protection. This week, we're bringing together a wide range of leaders on ocean and coastal issues. We'll be hearing from members of Congress, representatives of federal and state governments, industry leaders, academics, and nonprofit groups.

The piece of legislation I'm especially proud to be promoting is Oceans 21, a bill aimed at protecting, maintaining, and restoring the health of our marine ecosystems. This bill is based on the recommendations the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Ocean Commission made to Congress calling for a comprehensive ocean policy, reinforcing what those of us who live near the coast already knew: the oceans need our help.

An important piece of this bill would create a system of regional governance based on our ecosystems. No one knows our oceans better than those of us living near them. The bill would also help coordinate federal oceans activity, making for a more efficient, responsive system. Too many politicians don't realize the fundamental role our oceans play in so many facets of our lives. It's the job of each and every one of us to assure the government treats our oceans well.

We need look no further than the recent toxic algal blooms near Monterey Bay for a call to action. Pollution and destroyed wetlands both contribute to these blooms, which devastate ocean life, but could be prevented in the future through best management practices and better planning.

Our oceans mean too much to us to let them suffer. Too many of our favorite pastimes beg for healthy oceans: swimming, surfing, fishing and whale watching just to name a few. It's our obligation to protect the oceans, both for ourselves and our children. Oceans 21 will help put us on a path toward conservation and protection, ensuring the safety of one of our most vital public trusts.