

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0517

The Sad State of Our Oceans: Rep. Sam Farr's Call for National Action

- Our oceans are this country's **largest public trust resource**, covering an area 23% larger than the nation's land area (about one and a half times the size of the continental US) – **we must start treating them as such.**
- Every American depends, **directly and indirectly**, on the oceans – for food, jobs, scientific knowledge, recreation, spiritual reflection, and other reasons.
- Many Americans desire to be near an ocean. In fact, coastal watershed counties account for less than 25% of the nation's land area but are home to **50% of the U.S. population.**
- Our oceans and coastal areas contribute **over 1 trillion dollars / year** to our economy. If we don't change our course, we won't continue to see this economic benefit.
- **2 reports** released during the last year document the **urgent need** for improved management of US ocean resources:
 - The Pew Oceans Commission Report – private sector bipartisan group, and
 - The US Commission on Ocean Policy's Report – based on Oceans Act of 2000; Presidentally-appointed.
- Both reports stress that our **current system of oceans governance is inadequate or has failed.** It is fragmented, both institutionally and geographically, with over 10 federal departments and 20 federal agencies implementing over 140 laws.
- These 2 reports differ slightly on the details of how we should affect positive change; however, **they do not differ on assessment of the crises** facing the oceans.
- **Ocean crises resulting from human activities:**
 - **Polluted waters:** In 2001, 23% of the nation's coastal areas were unsuited for swimming, fishing, or supporting marine life and more than 80 of our coastal areas suffered from the negative consequences of nutrient overloading, such as toxic algal blooms.
 - **Compromised fisheries:** Only 8.6% of federally managed fish populations are known to be healthy while over 1/3 of the nation's fish stocks are overfished or experiencing overfishing.
 - **Other sad situations:** Irreversible loss of coral reefs; destruction of essential habitat; and staggering rates of marine mammal, sea turtle, sea bird, and non-target species bycatch in fisheries.
- **How we correct these crises: Congress should pass a bill that –**
 - **Employs an ecosystem-based management approach:** This type of approach transcends political boundaries and recognizes complex interactions between species, the air, land, and water which species depend.
 - **Improves national governance:** We desperately need a **national oceans policy** – one that states the **national goal is to protect and maintain healthy marine ecosystems** and where needed, to **restore the health of degraded marine systems.** At the heart of a new system of national governance is a **strengthened National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).**
 - **Creates strong regional governance:** Based on large marine ecosystems.
 - **Promotes an ocean stewardship ethic:** Based on a **long-term vision** of protecting, restoring, and maintaining healthy marine ecosystems.
 - **Invests in the future:** By strengthening marine science research and education.