

## 98

## Unite to Preserve our Oceans and Fisheries

No issue is more in need of a global solution than the preservation of our oceans. Overfishing, habitat destruction and chronic pollution from agriculture, sewage, industry and oil spills are rapidly turning our international waters into environmental dumping grounds unfit for life for any species. Marine conservation, fisheries and ocean waste-disposal practices are in desperate need of an international overhaul and solutions that we can work on together as a global community.

### A Convention That Works

Countries everywhere, both coastal and landlocked, need to work together to create effective global legislation to protect oceans and preserve

**We have to understand how close to extinction some of these populations really are. And we must act now, before they have reached the point of no return.**

— Ransom Myers, fisheries biologist,  
Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia

their fisheries. Countries must unite behind a new United Nations Convention with meaningful guidelines for ocean conservation.

In 1994 the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (LOS) was agreed to by nations around the world and heralded by the UN as “the most important international achievement since the approval of its Charter in 1945.” LOS, which has been ratified by 145 countries with a jurisdiction that covers 72% of the planet’s surface, has the potential to preserve life for millions of species, many of which have never been seen by human eyes. Sadly, after more than a decade in existence, LOS has failed to slow the destruction of the world’s oceans, being hindered by the United States’ refusal to ratify the agreement and by the conflict between member nations over conservation proposals. To be effective, LOS needs an overhaul, with all member nations agreeing to measures such as bycatch limits, a moratorium on bottom trawling and an end to offshore fish farming (see “5 Solutions for Fishers”).

In 2002, at the UN’s Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, 192 nations called on the global community to preserve its oceans and restore fisheries stocks. The delegates agreed to stop destructive fishing practices, establish protected marine areas and networks by 2012 and restore fish stocks, where possible, to levels that can be sustainably harvested by no later than 2015. Although the agreement is promising, critics say the use of “where possible” waters it down and may be too little, too late, with 70% of commercially important fish stocks around the globe already threatened with extinction.<sup>1</sup>

### Sanctuary in the Mediterranean

Countries around the Mediterranean Sea have accepted the urgent need to preserve its warm waters, where hundreds of animal and plant species are being threatened with extinction by the heavy impact of tourism.

Italy, France and Monaco have agreed to work with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to manage a large marine sanctuary in the northwestern Mediterranean between Sardinia, the Cote d’Azur and the Italian Ligurian coast. The new reserve is large, covering 84,000 kilometers, and is home to 2,000 whales and 40,000 dolphins during the summer months. This is the first marine protected area in the northern hemisphere to include international waters and sets a precedent for other countries to work together to create global solutions.

### A Global Proposal from New Zealand

In 2006 New Zealand proposed new international trade rules to stop governments paying massive subsidies to fishers to exploit the world's already overfished oceans. The proposal, part of New Zealand's ongoing campaign for greater sustainability of the world's marine resources, was presented at the World Trade Organization in Geneva to convince the world's wealthiest nations that they play a critical role in the global fisheries crisis. New Zealand's trade minister points out that industrialized nations pay out between \$15 billion and \$20 billion in subsidies annually,<sup>2</sup> allowing overfishing to continue at unsustainable levels. The proposal prohibits all forms of fishery subsidies, with some flexibility for less-developed nations.

Since 1950, with the onset of industrialized fisheries, we have rapidly reduced the resource base to less than 10%. Not just in some areas — but for entire communities of these large fish species from the tropics to the poles.

— Ransom Myers

- IUCN Global Marine Programme: [www.iucn.org/themes/marine](http://www.iucn.org/themes/marine)
- International Marine Mammal Association: [www.imma.org](http://www.imma.org)
- Marine Conservation Society: [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org)
- Mediterranean Dolphin Conservation: [www.delphismdc.org](http://www.delphismdc.org)
- National Coalition for Marine Conservation: [www.savethefish.org](http://www.savethefish.org)
- Nature Conservancy's Global Marine Conservation Initiative: [www.nature.org/initiatives/marine](http://www.nature.org/initiatives/marine)



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