



**WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY**  
**Wanted! Seas and Oceans: Dead or Alive?**  
**5 June 2004**



**FIFTY KEY FACTS ABOUT SEAS AND OCEANS**

1. Oceans cover 70 per cent of the Earth's surface.
2. More than 90 per cent of the planet's living biomass is found in the oceans.
3. Eighty per cent of all pollution in seas and oceans comes from land-based activities.
4. Forty per cent of the world's population lives within 60 kilometres of a coast.
5. Three-quarters of the world's megacities are by the sea.
6. By 2010, 80 per cent of people will live within 100 kilometres of the coast.
7. Death and disease caused by polluted coastal waters costs the global economy US\$12.8 billion a year. The annual economic impact of hepatitis from tainted seafood alone is US\$7.2 billion.
8. Plastic waste kills up to 1 million sea birds, 100,000 sea mammals and countless fish each year.
9. Sea creatures killed by plastic decompose, the plastic does not. Plastic remains in the ecosystem to kill again and again.
10. Harmful algal blooms, caused by an excess of nutrients — mainly nitrogen from agricultural fertilizers — have created nearly 150 coastal deoxygenated 'dead zones' worldwide, ranging from 1 to 70,000 square kilometres.
11. An estimated 21 million barrels of oil run into the oceans each year from street run-off, effluent from factories, and from ships flushing their tanks.
12. Over the past decade, an average of 600,000 barrels of oil a year has been accidentally spilled from ships, the equivalent of 12 disasters the size of the sinking of the oil tanker Prestige in 2002.
13. Oil tankers, transport 60 per cent (approximately 2,000 million tons) of oil consumed in the world.
14. More than 90 per cent of goods traded between countries are transported by sea.
15. Each year 10 billion tons of ballast water is transferred around the globe and released into foreign waters.
16. Ballast water often contains species — such as the zebra mussel and comb jellyfish — that can colonize their new environment to the detriment of native species and local economies.
17. Pollution, exotic species and alteration of coastal habitats are a growing threat to important marine ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs.
18. Tropical coral reefs border the shores of 109 countries, the majority of which are among the world's least developed. Significant reef degradation has occurred in 93 countries.
19. Although coral reefs comprise less than 0.5 per cent of the ocean floor, it is estimated that more than 90 per cent of marine species are directly or indirectly dependent on them.
20. There are about 4,000 coral reef fish species worldwide, accounting for approximately a quarter of all marine fish species.
21. The Great Barrier Reef, measuring 2,000 kilometres in length, is the largest living structure on Earth. It can be seen from the Moon.
22. Reefs protect human populations along coastlines from wave and storm damage by serving as buffers between oceans and near-shore communities.
23. Nearly 60 per cent of the world's remaining reefs are at significant risk of being lost in the next three decades.
24. The major causes of coral reef decline are coastal development, sedimentation, destructive fishing practices, pollution, tourism and global warming.
25. Climate change threatens to destroy the majority of the world's coral reefs, as well as wreak havoc on the fragile economies of Small Island Developing States.
26. Average sea level has risen between 10 and 25 centimetres in the past 100 years. If all the world's ice melted, the oceans would rise by 66 metres.
27. Sixty per cent of the Pacific shoreline and 35 per cent of the Atlantic shoreline are receding at a rate of one metre a year.

28. The phenomenon of coral bleaching is a major threat to coral health. In 1998, 75 per cent of the world's reefs were affected by coral bleaching. Sixteen per cent died.
29. The Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) calls for a global marine assessment by 2004 and the development of a global network of marine protected areas by 2012.
30. Less than one half a per cent of marine habitats are protected — compared with 11.5 per cent of global land area.
31. The High Seas — areas of the ocean beyond national jurisdiction — cover almost 50 per cent of the Earth's surface. They are the least protected part of the world.
32. Although there are some treaties that protect ocean-going species such as whales, as well as some fisheries agreements, there are no protected areas in the High Seas.
33. Studies show that protecting critical marine habitats — such as warm- and cold-water coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves — can dramatically increase fish size and quantity, benefiting both artisanal and commercial fisheries.
34. Ninety per cent of the world's fishermen and women operate at the small-scale local level, accounting for over half the global fish catch.
35. Ninety-five per cent of world fish catch (80 million tons) is from near-shore waters.
36. More than 3.5 billion people depend on the ocean for their primary source of food. In 20 years, this number could double to 7 billion.
37. Artisanal fishing communities, who harvest half the world's fish catch, are seeing their livelihoods increasingly threatened by illegal, unregulated or subsidized commercial fleets.
38. More than 70 per cent of the world's marine fisheries are now fished up to or beyond their sustainable limit.
39. Populations of commercially attractive large fish, such as tuna, cod, swordfish and marlin, have declined by as much as 90 per cent in the past century.
40. Governments at WSSD agreed, on an urgent basis and where possible by 2015, to maintain or restore depleted fish stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield.
41. The WSSD Plan of Implementation calls for the elimination of destructive fishing practices and subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.
42. Government subsidies — estimated at US\$15 to US\$20 billion per year — account for nearly 20 per cent of revenues to the fishing industry worldwide, promoting excess fishing capacity and encouraging over-fishing.
43. Destructive fishing practices are killing hundreds of thousands of marine species each year and helping to destroy important undersea habitats.
44. Each year, illegal longline fishing, which involves lines up to 80 miles long, with thousands of baited hooks, kills over 300,000 seabirds, including 100,000 albatrosses.
45. As many as 100 million sharks are killed each year for their meat and fins, which are used for shark fin soup. Hunters typically catch the sharks, de-fin them while alive and throw them back into the ocean where they either drown or bleed to death.
46. Global by-catch — unintended destruction caused by the use of non-selective fishing gear, such as trawl nets, longlines and gillnets — amounts to 20 million tons a year.
47. The annual global by-catch mortality of small whales, dolphins and porpoises alone is estimated to be more than 300,000 individuals.
48. Fishing for wild shrimp represents 2 per cent of global seafood but one-third of total by-catch. The ratio of by-catch from shrimp fishing ranges from 5:1 in temperate zones to 10:1 and more in the tropics.
49. Shrimp farming, too, is highly destructive. It causes chemical and fertilizer pollution of water and has been largely responsible for the destruction of nearly a quarter of the world's mangroves.
50. Mangroves provide nurseries for 85 per cent of commercial fish species in the tropics.