

Salt Water Solutions

The [Global Ocean Commission](#)¹ will be releasing a report and proposals for action this month (24 June), in an effort to reverse the degradation of the oceans. World unity on any issue may seem unlikely, but researching Saturday's article on the state of the oceans was an unexpectedly hopeful experience. It made me realize the real progress that's taking place right under our noses.

Since the moral challenge of our times is the realization of our interconnectedness on all levels, it follows naturally that there's a need for active international cooperation. International and supranational systems, representing the highest level in the development of human organization, have been under construction for many decades, and are needed more than ever.

I admit to being mystified at those online bloggers who speak of anything to do with the UN with such cynicism, as if we'd do better to return to a simpler age. Environmental issues especially seem to cry out for solutions without borders. An effective governance framework is a prerequisite for the peaceful preservation of humanity's cultural and biological heritage.

In any case, there's no room for false dichotomies and no time for enemies. Us-them, either-or thinking isn't just unhelpful – it's paralyzing. We need ideas of all sizes and from all philosophies to put together workable solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

The urgency of the need is indisputable. The current estimated date for the [total collapse of fisheries worldwide](#), if current levels of fishing are maintained, is 2048.

Private conservation organizations are, in fact, making a huge contribution. In researching this article, I found that Oceana, Rare and EKO Asset Management have recently banded together in the [Vibrant Oceans Initiative](#) of former NY Mayor Michael Bloomberg. An [article in *The Atlantic*](#) points out that this is a \$53-million effort when the real need is in the billions. This underscores the need for diverse means, but it's a notable effort in the right direction.

Andrew Sharpless, CEO of Oceana and author of [The Perfect Protein](#), explains: "National governments have the power to stop destructive industrial fishing within 200 nautical miles of shore, where most fish are caught. It's clear from the data that when governments enact and enforce the right policies, fish populations come back."

This has to be a large piece of any solution, since over 90% of the fish caught worldwide are within the 200 mile limit, where all small-scale fishers and most of the industrial fishing fleets operate. Again, this is linked to the need for effective management of the areas outside national boundaries. A new [study published 5 June](#) considers "the role of the high seas in supporting and replenishing coastal fish stocks so important it concludes that there is a strong argument for closing the high seas to all fishing."

The paradox of sustainability seems to be that with less destruction, there are greater returns. It's estimated that a fully protected ocean could sustainably provide food for 700 million people per day, about twice the amount currently supplied through the continually diminishing returns of overfishing.

¹ The Global Ocean Commission, launched February 2013, originated as an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts, in partnership with Somerville College at the University of Oxford, Adessium Foundation and Oceans 5. It has an international 17-member board of Commissioners, including Paul Martin of Canada.

One of the most exciting developments, with a powerful potential for the regeneration of the seas, is in the area of marine reserves. In 2010, the British government established the world's largest marine reserve in the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean. This fully "no-take zone", the strictest form of marine protected area (MPA), protects the world's largest coral atoll, and all species within it.

The [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) has set a target of protecting 10% of the oceans by 2020. B.C's [Living Oceans website](#) reports that Canada has made an international commitment "to build a network of MPAs on its Pacific coast by 2020, in which at least 10 percent of each ecological region is effectively conserved." It also noted that "The World Parks Congress recommends that **20-30 percent** of every habitat in the oceans be given full protection."

The [IPSO² 2013 State of the Ocean executive summary](#) gently reminds us that "Current targets for carbon emission reductions are insufficient in terms of ensuring coral reef survival, especially as there is a time lag of several decades between atmospheric CO₂ and CO₂ dissolved in the ocean." It calls for the establishment of a global high seas enforcement agency under the auspices of UNCLOS³.

The largest 20 cargo ships, consuming low grade bunker fuel, emit as much CO₂ in the course of a year as *all of the planet's cars combined*.

That last fact was a shock to me, and I'm sure to most people who are valiantly trying in their own small ways to cut back on energy consumption. The solution is hardly to throw up our hands and buy a Hummer, but it begs the question: what can be done? Despite the urgency, does a major part of the solution lie with parents and teachers who are bringing more awareness of these issues to the next generation? Are they also teaching hope? What is our own part in this as individuals?

In 1933, Shoghi Effendi, then head of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote: "We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions."

We have a sacred obligation to protect the environment. If the first step is awareness, then the second step must be to reflect and act according to whatever capacity and means we've been given as individuals. It seems especially important to also remember the capacity and means we possess collectively, and to have faith in the future.

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² IPSO: The International Programme on the State of the Ocean is a consortium of scientists and other Ocean experts. See www.stateoftheocean.org

³ The existing UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) agreement explicitly calls for the conservation, protection and preservation of the marine environment.