

**UN Millennium Development Goal No 7  
ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Target: To integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

## The Health of the Oceans

### Context

The health of the oceans and the life that they sustain throughout the Earth is a growing concern of organisations whose focus is the care of the world environment. Rising sea levels have significant effect on the populations living on the Pacific Islands and the coastal areas particularly of Pakistan, Burma and Bangladesh. While there is not complete agreement among the scientific community about the causes and extent of the problem, the results are having significant consequences for thousands of people around the world. It is also true that those who have to suffer the consequences of rising sea levels are contributing least to the causes of the disasters they face.

### United Nations Environment Program

The Mission of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

The **UNEP document on "Ocean Concerns"** states the following:

"The marine environment - including the oceans and all seas and adjacent coastal areas - forms an integrated whole that is an essential component of the global life-support system and a positive asset that presents opportunities for sustainable development.



"International law, as reflected in the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea... sets forth rights and obligations of States and provides the international basis upon which to pursue the protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment and its resources."

The following areas were identified as areas of grave concern:

- Integrated management and sustainable development of coastal areas, including exclusive economic zones;
- Marine environmental protection;
- Sustainable use and conservation of marine living resources of the high seas;
- Sustainable use and conservation of marine living resources under national jurisdiction;
- Addressing critical uncertainties for the management of the marine environment and climate change;
- Strengthening international, including regional, co-operation and co-ordination;
- Sustainable development of small islands.

For each of these areas the following strategies were outlined:

- the basis for action;
- the objectives;
- the activities required to achieve the objectives; and
- the means of implementation of the activities.

While acknowledging the vastness of the oceans of the world and the extensive resources that are contained in them, it is evident that these resources are being polluted and depleted by the activities of the human population to the detriment of that same population as well as the detriment of the populations of the oceans. Some of the statements from this document highlight the situations that exist and the role of human activity.

Degradation of the marine environment can also result from a wide range of activities on land. Human settlements, land use, construction of coastal infrastructure, agriculture, forestry, urban development, tourism and industry can affect the marine environment. Coastal erosion and siltation are of particular concern.

Management of high seas fisheries, including the adoption, monitoring and enforcement of effective conservation measures, is inadequate in many areas.

Marine fisheries yield 80 to 90 million tons of fish and shellfish per year, 95 per cent of which is taken from waters under national jurisdiction. Yields have increased nearly fivefold over the past four decades.

Marine living resources provide an important source of protein in many countries and their use is often of major importance to local communities and indigenous people. Such resources provide food and livelihoods to millions of people and, if sustainably utilised, offer increased potential to meet nutritional and social needs, particularly in developing countries.

The marine environment is vulnerable and sensitive to climate and atmospheric changes.

There are many uncertainties about climate change and particularly about sea-level rise.

Small island developing States, and islands supporting small communities are a special case both for environment and development. They are ecologically fragile and vulnerable. Their small size, limited resources, geographic dispersion and isolation from markets, place them at a disadvantage economically and prevent economies of scale. For small island developing States, the ocean and coastal environment is of strategic importance and constitutes a valuable development resource.

The document points out that more than half of the population of the world lives within 60 kilometres of the shoreline, and that human activities, whether it be agriculture, fishing practices, release of effluent or dumping of wastes, make significant contribution to the decimation of the life of the ocean.



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Although the activities suggested in the UNEP document are those that have to be addressed by local, national and international governmental bodies, each of us is responsible for the actions that we take.

These include our responsible disposal of waste and our civic responsibility to ensure that our elected representatives on these decision making bodies act responsibly to ensure that our own and future generations have access to the life and richness of healthy oceans.

The full text of the UNEP document is available at the *United Nations Environment Program* [www.oceansatlas.org/unatlas/uses/uneptextsph/settleph/agenda21chapter17.html#top](http://www.oceansatlas.org/unatlas/uses/uneptextsph/settleph/agenda21chapter17.html#top)

Another site that gives a more concise statement of the issues and description of the approach to the problems and the results achieved is *Defying Ocean's End: An Agenda for Action* at [www.lecall.org/defyingoceansend/concern.shtml](http://www.lecall.org/defyingoceansend/concern.shtml)

Also visit the Edmund Rice Centre's Eco Justice Project [www.erc.org.au/](http://www.erc.org.au/)



## Reflection

*"Calling me to Consciousness...  
walking reverently on Earth"*

*How do we maintain hope in the face of  
rising sea levels?*

*Spirituality and Practice* presents a theory that hope can be practised and nourished.

[www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/)

**"Hope** is a positive and potent spiritual practice with the power to pull us through difficult times. It is usually described with light metaphors - a ray, a beam, a glimmer of hope; the break in the clouds; the light at the end of the dark tunnel. It is often discovered in unexpected places.

Hope can be learned with practice. Certain attitudes support it. One is patience, an ability to tolerate delays, a willingness to let events unfold in their own time. The other is courage, an attitude of confidence even when facing the unknown. A third is persistence, the determination to keep going no matter what happens. We have hope when we can say, all will be well, and we mean it."

**Source:** [www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/)

## PRACTICE

Prepare a space for you to sit quietly for about 10 minutes and imagine yourself surrounding earth with hopefulness - you are sending messages of hope based on the belief that all will be well.

*"Treading consciously on earth... You are  
Healthy as I speak...sending healing love to all...  
Tender God of compassion."*

## Action

There are several actions we can take to help those who are suffering from rising sea levels and the resultant loss of their homes.

As individuals we can take seriously the call to cut down on our use of fossil fuels thereby reducing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

During the lead-up to the Federal election in 2007, the Labor Party promised to take action to help Pacific climate refugees. So far this promise has not become policy. The Friends of the Earth website encourages us to take action by lobbying politicians. Think seriously about signing the petition.

Friends of the Earth International  
[www.foei.org/en/get-involved/take-action/climate-refugees/](http://www.foei.org/en/get-involved/take-action/climate-refugees/)

There are many websites detailing the tidal problems faced by Tuvalu, just one of the islands in danger of being inundated.

Tuvalu Islands  
[www.tuvaluislands.com/warming.htm](http://www.tuvaluislands.com/warming.htm)

Alofa Tuvalu  
[www.alofatuvalu.tv/page\\_cadres\\_us.html](http://www.alofatuvalu.tv/page_cadres_us.html)

**From:** Specific Issues Committee, Eco-Justice (Sisters Margaret Abbott, Mary Dennett, Kate McGrath and Patricia Powell). The Committee warmly invites your response to the article or the issue.

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