



Oceans

Oceans produce oxygen, drive climate and absorb carbon. But pollution, overfishing and excess carbon have depleted marine life and changed the fundamental chemistry of the ocean.

The following is a summary of a panel discussion at the 2008 Society of Environmental Journalists annual meeting. Panelists Dennis Heinemann of the Ocean Conservancy, Jackie Savitz of Oceana and Chris Kirkham of The Times-Picayune discussed issues facing oceans and the practical ways to reverse the trends.

State of Oceans:

- Like the climate on land, the ocean's climate is warming
- More carbon dioxide in atmosphere means more carbon sequestered by oceans. This has led to acidification and bleaching of corals, threatening the rainforests of the oceans.
- Eutrophication – over fertilizing the ocean - depleted oxygen levels and made large areas devoid of life
- Most change happening in the Arctic – warming is twice as much, wildlife has no place to go, a gold rush for oil will soon take place

How to Reverse Course:

- Must reduce carbon dioxide levels to 350 ppm to save coral reefs. If we don't, may have massive extinction of corals that will have a ripple effect. We are at 378 ppm
- Must move beyond a single species approach in fishery management
- Ocean refuges should be established, especially in very ecological fragile areas

Story Ideas

- How to sell stories of declining coral health to the public? It is what we eat and in some communities it is what people depend on
- Aquaculture is about to take off. If done correctly it will create great value. If done incorrectly it could mean devastation
- Carbon sequestration in oceans, how plausible is this solution?