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Pew Oceans Commission

The oceans are very much in my lifeblood, because I was born in Monterey California, raised there. It was a fishing village when I was a boy. It was the sardine capital of the world. They caught almost a billion fish during the season, and so many sardines that the boats used to be overloaded with them. They would bring them to Cannery Row, that John Steinbeck made famous, and so there were a lot of jobs. A lot of people in the community were dependent on the fishing industry. In the late 40s, early 50s, the sardines suddenly were gone because they had been over fished.

It's a tragedy for that community as to what happened. It's a tragedy that I don't want to see repeated in other parts of the country. That's why I got involved with oceans issues and with the Pew Oceans Commission.

The unfortunate thing is that it is a lesson we just seem to fail to learn. It's happened with cod fisheries in New England. It happened with the shrimp industry in the gulf. We're seeing fisheries like salmon as well as a lot of the ground fish basically being depleted, and those fisheries are literally being destroyed.

It should be a wake up call that if we don't respond to this crisis, and try to restore these fisheries, as someone once said to our Pew commission, "what we're witnessing is the last buffalo hunt going on with our fisheries."

The reality that we discovered during the work of the Pew commission is that if you really want to deal with the problems affecting the ocean, you have to deal with them in an ecosystem kind of approach. You've got to look not just at the ocean, but you've got to look at the rivers that feed into the ocean. And, whether it's pollution, whether it's the damage that's been done to our fisheries, there is a relationship. So any kind of planning has to be done on an ecosystem basis. What you are seeing in the Klamath is a perfect example.

What is happening up river in the Klamath, and the fact that the salmon fishery is being destroyed, is ultimately destroying the salmon industry as we know it on the (west) coast. Fishermen are finding that the salmon are literally gone, and we are looking at the destruction of another fishery as the result of our failure to deal not only with the ocean problem of the salmon, but with the upstream problem of the salmon such as spawning .

Aquaculture is a huge issue. It's an industry that is growing rapidly largely because of the damage being done to the wild fisheries. There are industries that are turning to aquaculture to raise these fisheries, to raise them in an artificial situation in which they can produce them almost factory like. The problem we're running into is that there are very few standards that deal with aquaculture in this country, and so each day they have

kind of a different set of standards. And when you deal with aquaculture in the world, there are literally no standards that apply to that industry.

The damage is that these fisheries can, if they invade the wild fisheries, impact on the fish because of what they feed them. Aquaculture can pollute the waters in that part of the ocean. So there's a lot of damage that can result, and that's why we need to have some kind of national standards dealing with aquaculture. We can't do away with the aquaculture industry. It's going to happen, but we can do something about ensuring that the industry doesn't damage the wild fisheries.

Our oceans are in crisis. It doesn't take much to look at the science that we looked at, and come to the same conclusion. When it comes to our fisheries, for example, when 90 percent of big fish in the ocean are gone as science tells us, we are losing the most glorious resource we have in our oceans. These fisheries are being depleted whether its sardines, or salmon, or cod, and we are losing our fisheries as we know it. There is the whole issue of pollution that is impacting our coastline. We are seeing these huge dead zones that are appearing off of our coast line. There is one in the Gulf that is the result of run-off from the Mississippi. It is literally the size of the state of Massachusetts. There is no life in the dead zone; it's killed all life. We are seeing the same thing happen off the east coast and the west coast. We are seeing the problem of coastal development take place. Over 50 percent of our population lives along our coastlines.

Now we pay a real price for that, because it damages our wetlands. We have lost 90 percent of our historic wetlands. We are losing the nurseries for our fish, and we are losing those vital wetlands that can protect our coastlines. Katrina in the gulf damaged New Orleans in large measure because the wetlands along the Mississippi were gone.

The key recommendations are first of all, what we don't have in this country is a federal policy that says our oceans should be a national trust. There is no encompassing law in this country that says that we have a responsibility to protect our oceans. We have done that with clean air, we have done that with clean water. We don't have that with regards to our oceans. So the first thing is to commit this country to recognize that we have an obligation to future generations to protect this resource for the future.

Secondly, we've got to better coordinate governance policy when it comes to our oceans. There is very little coordination between the federal, state and local government. That's why we strongly recommended that at the federal level, certainly there has to be better coordination policy. But, more importantly, there has to be an ecosystem management approach to dealing with our fisheries that looks at federal, state, local laws and interests, and brings them together under a common management plan that can restore our oceans for the future. We obviously need to provide greater resources for science and for research. We pointed that out. It is a scandal what we provide right now in terms of ocean research and education.

Lastly, we need to implement the kind of improvements in the laws related to pollution, and to coastal development to insure that we reduce the amount of damage that is taking place. All of these steps need to be taken, but first and foremost, we have got to make a commitment that the oceans are important for our future.

I think we have to make clear that the oceans are important to life itself. Life in many ways, as we know, came from the oceans, and we are dependent on the oceans. We are dependent on our oceans for our climate; we are dependent on the oceans for our nutrition; we are dependent on the oceans for our weather system; and we are dependent on the oceans for our economy in terms of not only the fishing community, but the other resources that flow from our oceans. We are dependent on our oceans for our recreation and our enjoyment. In many ways, we are dependent on our oceans for our very spirit. I think it was John Kennedy who said oceans are the salt in our veins. I believe that and so we've got to make people understand whether they are on the coastline, or whether they are in the Midwest, that all of us depend on the oceans for life itself.

There is no question that what we are seeing in terms of climate change is something that will affect all of us in the country, and for that matter, it will affect the world. I mean we are all familiar with the concerns about global warming, and what is happening with climate change. The devastating consequences that can take place. Let me tell you, it's having a very destructive impact on the oceans as well. There is a process called acidification that is taking place as the oceans warm. As a result of that, we are losing a lot of our ocean resources because of climate change and global warming. It's impacting our resources, it's impacting our oceans, and if we don't fix this soon, it can jeopardize the very oceans that all of us have grown to love.

There is good news, in the sense that it's not too late. It isn't too late to take the steps we need to take to restore the resource. We have seen efforts in Alaska related to the salmon, related to how they bring science and the communities together to confront the issue of how they should manage the fishery. As a result of that, they have restored some of the fisheries that were impacted. On the Chesapeake Bay, it has had a tremendous impact in terms of their fishery as a result of pollution that flowed into the Chesapeake Bay. A plan was developed and incorporated all of the states along the Chesapeake Bay. It incorporated the federal government, state governments, and local governments to put together a plan to insure that they would restore the fisheries in Chesapeake bay. And, as a result of controlling run-offs, as a result of improving the streams that flow into the Chesapeake, and also controlling the fisheries there, they have helped restore the fisheries that were almost wiped out.

We've seen it along the west coast as well with regards to the whole issue of otters. The otters were kind of the symbol of Monterey, and suddenly they became depleted for a number of reasons. As a result of protecting them and trying to insure that we could restore them, we are now seeing the otter population beginning to come back. So it can happen, we can restore this resource. That's the good news, but, to do that, we've got to make a fundamental commitment that the ocean is important to all of us.

I don't think there's any question that the endangered species act is working. There have been a lot of gripes about it. I have been on both the legislative branch and the executive branch dealing with the concerns of how that law is implemented. But, I have to tell you in the end it is a huge success story. Because what we have done is we have identified those species that are in trouble, and taken steps to insure that they are around. It is really all about, in the end, what kind of world do we pass on to our children that really is the fundamental issue here. If we care about the world we pass on to our children, if we want them to enjoy what we are able to enjoy in terms of natural resources today, then we have to implement the endangered species act. We have to implement other laws that insure that we protect those resources for the future.

We've seen the gray whale population come back, and so we're beginning to enjoy that. But, at the same time, we are seeing some of our basic fisheries continue to be depleted. When I was a kid, the Monterey fishing industry was an industry that was vibrant. Families were dependent on it. A lot of those fisheries are gone because we have done a lousy job managing the resource.

To some extent, what we're beginning to do in Monterey, and I think elsewhere, we are beginning to set up reserves. Ocean reserves that say these are areas that very frankly we're not going to allow any fishing so that we can give the fishery resource a chance to come back. We just established those with the state government of California, and I think this may be one of the answers for the future as to how we restore fisheries and how we restore wildlife to our oceans.

Establishing reserves was an interesting story. Having always had a great appreciation for our coastline and the ocean, when I came back as a member of congress, the secretary of interior came into my office, a man by the name of Jim Watt. He said that we ought to establish offshore drilling and allow the selling of all of our offshore areas for offshore drilling. I said: "I can't imagine that you're going to put areas like Big Sur and Monterey Bay up to offshore drillers". And I remember speaking to the secretary, "that is not going to happen. We're not going to allow one of our greatest national treasures like Monterey Bay, the Big Sur coast, Mendocino coast to simply be sold to the highest bidder".

As a result of that, I was the author of legislation to put a moratorium on offshore drilling. It's actually a law that's still in place in the congress. Ultimately, I decided I'm not going to do this on a year-to-year basis. So I went to establish permanent protection for the Monterey Bay and for the Big Sur coast. So, I pushed legislation, drafted it, and pushed it through the congress creating the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, which is the largest sanctuary in the system. And it was done, not just because obviously I was interested in protecting the coastline but, because the whole area — business community, agriculture, fishermen — all joined together to make that happen.

There's been obviously a lot of distortion about the creatures that are part of our ocean, the wonderful wildlife that's part of our oceans. I mean movies like Jaws, I know they

sell a lot of tickets to people who want to see movies like that, but in many ways they also distort the wonderful nature of that creature that is the shark. We just put a white shark in the Monterey Bay Aquarium. To watch that great fish, and see it in all of its wonder is something. I'm glad people can go there and see it because it's a lot different from seeing the artificial one that they had in *Jaws*. Part of this effort has to be about better education of the American public, about what our oceans are all about.

We take our oceans for granted. There's a lot of water out there and you can't see what's going on below the surface. A lot of people kind of say well the ocean can fix itself. The reality is it can't. We're destroying our oceans and we've got to take steps to try to make sure that resource is protected for the future.

I am optimistic by nature, but I also am wise enough because of my experience in the congress and the administration, to know that nothing happens unless you fight for it. And, the real message that has to go out to the American people is you're all going to have to fight to protect that resource. If you stand back, if you assume that somehow it will take care of itself, it can be lost, but if you are willing to fight to protect it then I think we can protect it for the future.

Well it has to be fought on a number of fronts. Obviously one is on policy. In Washington, there have to be people who care about our oceans, have to be willing to lobby members of congress, and have to be willing to show they are concerned about steps that are taken to protect our fisheries, to improve our efforts at trying to protect against pollution, and over-development. There has to be an effort to make this an issue that you are willing to confront your local representative on.

Secondly, it's really important that people engage at the local level in terms of education to insure that our children really do understand the importance of our oceans. I mean the classes that go through the Monterey Bay Aquarium — suddenly you see a light in the children's eyes when they are looking at a resource they never quite knew was there. It is remarkable. And I think a lot of those children will be dedicated to protecting our oceans in the future. So we have to improve their education. We have to improve the way we approach nutrition and be wiser about making decisions with regard to the fish we eat. And lastly, we've got to be willing to put money into research.

Science and research are absolutely essential to this effort because frankly, we can't do this job unless we know what is happening underneath the ocean. The only way we're going to do that is with research. I was amazed that there is a figure, something like 5000 people, who in one way or another have gone up to Mount Everest. There are 300 people that have gone to the moon, but there are only 3 people that have gone to the deepest part of our oceans. We need to understand our oceans much better than that.