

# A CALL TO ACTION ON THE FATE OF OUR OCEANS



## *An International Proposal by Leading Scientists to Save Endangered Marine Life From Extinction*

As scientists concerned about the health of our oceans, we have joined together in support of fishing policies that ensure the long-term survival of targeted fish populations, endangered marine species and the fishing-related economy.

In recent decades the impact of commercial fishing on ocean ecosystems has dramatically increased, and we are confronted with the unprecedented reality that we are rapidly depleting the oceans' resources. The oceans, once mistakenly thought to be inexhaustible, clearly are not.

The United Nations reports over 70% percent of global fish populations are overfished or at the brink of being overfished, compared to just 5% reported only 40 years ago. Moreover, indiscriminate commercial fishing practices wastefully harm and kill millions of non-targeted animals per year, causing unsustainable mortality to sea turtles, sea birds, bluefin tuna, swordfish and sharks.

The Pacific leatherback sea turtle is at the top of the list of species being driven to the brink of extinction by increased efforts of global industrial fishing. The Pacific leatherback turtle's nesting population has plummeted from 91,000 in 1980 to fewer than 5,000 in 2002. Recent studies warn that unless immediate and significant steps are taken, the world's largest and most wide-ranging sea turtle will soon become extinct.

The plight of the leatherback sea turtle foreshadows a host of extinction events that may significantly alter the oceans' ecosystem functions. Leatherbacks have swum the Earth's oceans for over 100 million years and are part of a complex web of life that is rapidly unraveling. If we allow the leatherback to vanish from the oceans, we alter the balance that exists amongst predators and prey and risk the future of a host of other marine species.

Leading sea turtle biologists and ocean experts recognize that pelagic longline and gillnet fishing pose the principal immediate threats to Pacific leatherback turtles at sea, while the exploitation of eggs and destruction of nesting habitat are key threats during their short terrestrial existence.

Recognizing that measures that protect leatherbacks at sea also will benefit a wide assemblage of marine species that are either targeted or incidentally captured by these indiscriminate fishing methods,

### WE THE UNDERSIGNED:

- Call on the United Nations, United States and other nations to institute a moratorium on pelagic longline, gillnet and other fishing techniques that harm Pacific leatherback sea turtles until such activities can be conducted without harm to the species;
- Urge fishing nations to reduce the overall quantity of fishing effort to enable the long-term survival of targeted fish populations and the fishers and communities who depend on them;
- Call on pelagic longline and gillnet fisheries to assess their impacts and implement precautionary fishing principles in other impacted ocean basins, to avoid similar extinction crises among sea turtles, tuna, swordfish, sharks, sea birds and other affected species;
- Request that the governments of all nations where Pacific leatherback turtles nest immediately protect these sites, stop egg collection and maximize hatchling survival; and
- Urge that transitional aid be allocated to fishers and communities who are impacted by shifts in policy that move the human species toward the sustainable use of the oceans.

The measures outlined above will help people worldwide who depend on the oceans for their livelihood and sustenance. And we feel these actions are necessary to enable marine species such as the leatherback sea turtle to survive and flourish.

Sincerely,

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And more than 350 scientists from 43 nations.  
(Affiliations for identification purposes only.)



CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

To view a copy of the letter and the full list of endorsing scientists,  
please visit our website at [www.seaturtles.org](http://www.seaturtles.org).

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Sea Turtle Restoration Project is a project of Turtle Island Restoration Network.