

For Immediate Release
November 6, 2006

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Our Oceans are in Danger: How Long Before Congress Acts?

Study's Alarming Findings Should Spur Congressional Action

WASHINGTON, DC – The results of a study published in the November 3 issue of the journal *Science* finds that at the current rate of decline, the world's fisheries could be almost completely depleted within the next 50 years. In response to the article's findings, the Co-Chairs of the Joint Oceans Commission Initiative, Admiral James D. Watkins (U.S. Navy, Ret.) and the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, issued the following statement:

"This study provides yet another signal that all is not well in the world's oceans. Pollution, overfishing, and habitat loss are slowly and insidiously destroying the capacity of our oceans to provide the bountiful resources and services on which we've come to rely. Our failure to fully recognize and address the cumulative impacts of human activities – including the growing size and intensity of harmful algal blooms, the continuing loss of coral reefs and biodiversity they support, and the depletion of fish stocks – is becoming increasingly evident.

Securing the health of our oceans is not just an ecological issue; it's an economic one as well. The possible collapse of the global fishing industry could have serious, reverberating effects on the U.S. and international economy. Fortunately, the opportunity for the United States to make significant forward progress is readily available if Congress chooses to act.

Legislation to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, including strengthening provisions that will help prevent overfishing, encourage an ecosystem-based management approach, and improve the management of international fisheries, is ready to be passed. Also pending in Congress is legislation addressing coral reef protection, marine debris, ocean exploration, and observing systems that will enhance our capacity to monitor, understand, and protect marine ecosystems. These policies will be empty promises without adequate funding to implement them, so Congress must also act on spending bills for 2007 to ensure that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other relevant agencies have the resources necessary to protect our oceans.

The enactment of a comprehensive package of ocean reform bills, supported by increased funding, would be a significant step forward. Congress should not leave town without passing such legislation.

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The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission to catalyze ocean policy reform. The Initiative is guided by a ten-member Task Force, five from each Commission, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins (U.S. Navy, Ret.) and the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, chairs of the U.S. Commission and Pew Commission, respectively. The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform. www.jointoceancommission.org

