

**An International Call for a Moratorium in the Pacific Ocean  
on Pelagic Longline and Gillnet Fishing  
February 2003**

As leading nongovernmental organizations concerned about the fate of our oceans, we have joined together in support of healthy marine ecosystems and sustainable fishing policies. We seek to reverse the current trend towards depletion of our oceans' resources, which threatens the long-term survival of fish populations, the viability of economies based upon fishing, and extinction of marine species. We also are specifically concerned about the impacts of pelagic longline and gillnet fishing on the critically endangered Pacific leatherback sea turtle.

In recent decades, the impact of commercial fisheries on fish populations, marine species and the ocean ecosystem has dramatically increased. We are now confronted with the unprecedented reality that we are rapidly depleting our oceans' resources. The oceans, once mistakenly thought to be inexhaustible, are in dire straits. As the oceans are essential to sustaining human life and the well-being of the planet, we must reverse this trend immediately.

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

In addition to the damage they cause to populations of ocean species, indiscriminate industrial fishing techniques are driving community fishers out of business. They are taking food off the plates of millions of people who depend on small-scale fishing for sustenance. Relatedly, as the oceans are depleted, the sustenance, economic opportunity, scientific understanding and cultural, aesthetic and recreational enjoyment they offer is diminished.

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. Leading scientists warn that unless immediate and significant steps are taken, the leatherback sea turtle, which has swum the oceans since the time of the dinosaurs 100 million years ago, will soon become extinct. Moreover, the plight of the leatherback sea turtle, the world's largest and most wide-ranging sea turtle, may foreshadow a host of extinction events that may significantly alter the oceans' ecosystem functions.

Leading sea turtle biologists and ocean experts recognize that the principal threats to Pacific leatherback turtles at sea currently are from the pelagic longline and gillnet fisheries. Thousands of Pacific leatherbacks are being unintentionally caught and killed by these indiscriminate lines and nets that are cast over the entirety of the ocean, home to the sea turtles the vast majority of their lives.

Furthermore, exploitation of eggs, and destruction of nesting habitat threaten the species during their short terrestrial existence.

Recognizing that protective measures aimed at recovering leatherbacks 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 Pacific pelagic longline, gillnet and other fishing techniques that harm 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 that depend on them;

Call on fishing nations to begin necessary studies to assess the impacts of their pelagic longline and gillnet fisheries, and implement precautionary fishing principles in other impacted ocean basins to avoid similar extinction crises; and

Urge that transitional aid be allocated to affected fishers and communities impacted by shifts in policy that move the human species toward sustainable use of ocean resources.

The measures outlined above will not only help protect our oceans and marine species, but both large and small-scale commercial and artisanal fishers, and people worldwide who depend on the oceans for their livelihood and sustenance. We feel these actions are necessary to help enable marine species, such as the leatherback sea turtle, which have swum the earth's oceans for over 100 million years, to survive and flourish.

Sincerely,

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