

Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Transportation  
(9 June, 2009)

**“The Blue Economy: The Role of the Oceans in our Nation’s Economic Future”**

Testimony by:

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The ocean is the lifeblood of the Earth, covering more than 70 percent of the planet's surface, driving weather, regulating temperature and ultimately, supporting all living organisms. Throughout history, the ocean has been a vital source of sustenance, transport, commerce, growth and inspiration.

But the decline of the oceans due to pollution, overfishing, and climate change is now increasingly being felt in the quality of life of people on land. This was never more apparent to me than during our Expedition last month to Louisiana.

Louisiana’s wetlands are twice the size of the Everglades National Park, funnel more oil into the US than the Alaskan Pipeline, sustain one of the nation’s largest fisheries, and provide vital hurricane protection for New Orleans. And they are disappearing under the Gulf of Mexico at the rate of 33 football fields a day.

While we were in Louisiana, we spent time with the Cajun shrimp fishermen who have been fishing the Gulf of Mexico for five generations. The core component of the culture of coastal Louisiana is shrimping and fishing. It's not just the way people have historically made their living. It is life. It is what they do. It is who they are.

Scott St Pierre, a shrimp fisherman in his mid forties told me “We’re not American, we’re Cajun. We love food, we love our families, we love the church, and we love to fish.” They’re obviously proud of their unique culture, and the fact that they contribute significantly to the 40 percent of US seafood supplied from Louisiana’s waters.

Sadly, the Cajun way of life is gradually dying out due to pressure from a number of factors, all related to water. The land is rapidly sinking because Louisiana’s wetlands have been nearly destroyed. Hurricanes, which are growing increasingly frequent and powerful due to climate change, threaten to wipe the town off the map. And local young people are leaving for jobs in big cities in part because a massive amount of agricultural runoff is creating a Dead Zone the size of New Jersey that is eradicating the Gulf of Mexico’s shrimp supplies.

This story, like so many others that I have seen in coastal communities around the world, underscores the reason why, as a Cousteau, I spend a large part of my time on land, talking with small communities, rather than on a boat or diving underwater. Because while the degradation of the oceans is happening out there, it is being felt right here- in the homes of everyday people

all over this country and around the world.

If we are to take ocean policy seriously, we need to take it onto the land. We must start to realize that there can be no stand alone policies, especially as they relate to our water resources. Energy, transportation, climate change, infrastructure, agriculture, urban development: this is where our ocean policies must begin. It is all interconnected.

Water is Earth's great storyteller. It is the mark of sustainability in a culture and is where we will feel the effects of climate change first. Unless we begin to work together to build a shared focus on this blue planet as a single hydrosphere, we will never build the kind of momentum it takes to leverage real and long-term change.