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Scientists urge world leaders to respond cooperatively to Pacific Ocean threats

Manado, Indonesia. More than 400 leading scientists from nearly two-dozen countries have signed a consensus statement on the major threats facing the Pacific Ocean. The threats identified as the most serious and pervasive include overfishing, pollution, habitat destruction and climate change.

“This is first time the scientific community has come together in a single voice to express urgency over the environmental crisis facing the Pacific Ocean,” said Meg Caldwell, executive director of the Center for Ocean Solutions, who will present the statement on Wednesday, May 13 at 6:30 a.m. U.S. Eastern Time to government officials gathered at the World Ocean Conference in Manado, Indonesia. “The scientific community urges governments to respond now, cooperatively, to these threats before their impacts accelerate beyond our ability to respond.”

The consensus statement, entitled “Ecosystems and People of the Pacific Ocean: Threats and Opportunities for Action,” emerged from a scientific workshop in Honolulu hosted by the Center for Ocean Solutions in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Ocean Conservancy. The workshop was part of a broader effort by the three organizations to challenge countries throughout the Pacific region to improve the health of marine ecosystems by 2020.

In the consensus statement, the scientists warn that if left unchecked, the cumulative impacts of overfishing, pollution and habitat destruction—exacerbated by climate change—could have devastating consequences for coastal economies, food supplies, public health and political stability. These threats affect all members of the Pacific Ocean community, said Stephen Palumbi, director of Stanford University’s Hopkins Marine Station and one of the principal organizers of the consensus

statement. “Remarkable similarity exists between the major problems experienced in poor and rich countries alike, in populous nations and on small islands,” said Palumbi, a professor of biology and a senior fellow at Stanford’s Woods Institute for the Environment.

In addition to listing the serious environmental challenges facing the Pacific Ocean, the consensus statement also highlighted a set of potential solutions now being applied and tested at various scales throughout the region. Examples include the establishment of marine protected areas and the creation of economic incentives for activities that promote rather than degrade ecosystem health. “These efforts have shown remarkable success at local scales in maintaining biological and human economic diversity, particularly when applied with adequate levels of regulation and enforcement in place,” said Caldwell, a senior lecturer at Stanford Law School and at the Woods Institute. “These solutions are indicators of hope within an ocean of distress.”

The consensus statement was largely based on a synthesis of more than 3,400 scientific papers on the threats and impacts to the Pacific prepared by the Center for Ocean Solutions. The Pacific Ocean Synthesis provides “a roadmap by which governments might chart a new course of policy for the Pacific region,” said Biliana Cicin-Sain, a professor of marine policy at the University of Delaware and coordinator of the Global Forum on Oceans, Coasts and Islands, a multi-stakeholder network committed to advancing ocean issues within international agreements.

“The impacts of misuse of our ocean resources on our economy, our environment and our community can no longer be ignored,” said Gov. Sinyo Harry Sarundajang of the Indonesian province of North Sulawesi, whose capital Manado is hosting the World Ocean Conference. The governor will convene the event with Caldwell on Wednesday. “We must work together at the regional and transboundary levels to find solutions for improved management of our common ocean.”

The scientific consensus statement and synthesis can be found at the Center for Ocean Solutions website, http://www.centerforoceansolutions.org/initiatives_poi.html. Scientists interested in signing the consensus statement can send an email to POIstatement@stanford.edu.

Based in Monterey, Calif., the Center for Ocean Solutions is a collaboration of three leading marine science and policy institutions—Stanford University (through its Woods Institute for the Environment and Hopkins Marine Station), the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI). The center focuses on finding practical, enduring solutions to major challenges facing the oceans.

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