

SeaWeb

American Attitudes Toward Marine Protected Areas And Fully Protected Marine Reserves

As the research director for Sea Web, I'm here to present American Attitudes
Toward Marine Protected Areas and Fully Protected Marine Reserves

Methodology

- **Two studies are reported here:**
 -  ***Attitudes Toward Marine Reserves***
 - 1000 adult Americans interviewed nationwide
 - Interviews conducted February 9-11, 2001
 - Margin of error +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level
 -  ***Public Attitudes Toward Protected Areas in the Ocean***
 - Designed and conducted by the Mellman Group
 - 802 adult Americans were interviewed nationwide
 - An additional 250 adults residing in coastal states were also interviewed yielding 497 interviews among coastal state respondents
 - Interviews were conducted September 25 to October 3, 1999
 - Margin of error for the base sample is +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level

First, a note about methodology: Two studies are reported here. The most recent is “Attitudes Toward Marine Reserves” in which 1000 adult Americans nationwide were surveyed in February 2001. The margin of error on this survey is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The second study is “Attitudes Toward Protected Areas in The Ocean” in which 1052 adult Americans were surveyed, 802 nationwide and 250 additional interviews among people living in coastal states. The coastal states data was weighted back into the base to match the actual distribution of the population. The margin of error on this survey results is +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Overview of Key Research Findings:

-  The public has strong positive associations and emotional connections to the oceans
-  The public believes the oceans are in trouble
-  Most believe regulations protecting the oceans are too lax and there is broad support for taking a tougher regulatory approach to protect the ocean including establishing protected areas and strengthening protections in the National Marine Sanctuaries
-  The public clearly perceives appropriate and inappropriate uses of the ocean in protected areas:
 - Support research and recreational activities
 - Oppose invasive or extractive commercial activities

First, an overview of key findings, then we'll go through the results in more detail.

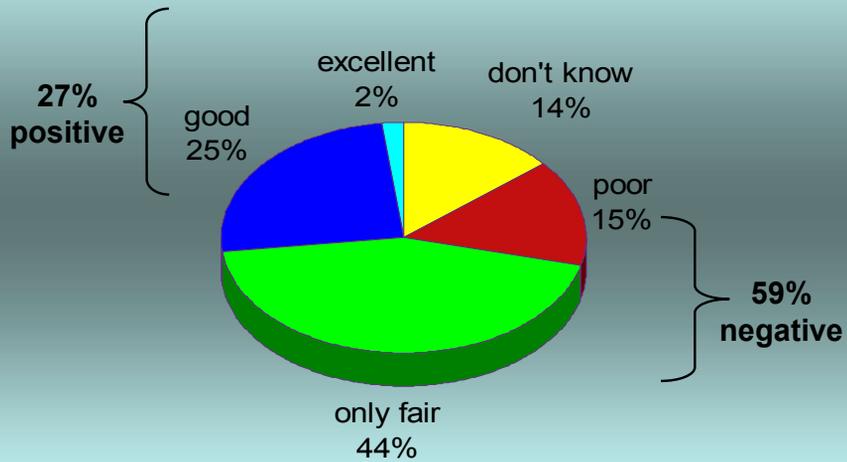
- The public has strong positive associations and emotional connections to the oceans; and
- The public believes the oceans are in trouble;
- Most believe regulations protecting the oceans are too lax and there is broad support for taking a tougher regulatory approach to protect the ocean, including establishing protected areas and strengthening protections in the National Marine Sanctuaries;
- The public perceives appropriate and inappropriate uses of the ocean in protected areas;
- They support research and recreational activities; while
- They oppose invasive or extractive commercial uses.

Overview of Key Research Findings, Continued

-  The public believes the main threat to the ocean is pollution. Fisheries problems are mostly below their radar
-  Likewise, ocean problems are not top of mind environmental considerations
-  People understand that “water and fish move around” and do not understand how we can draw boundaries in the ocean
-  People assume a greater level of protection exists than actually does

- The public believes the main threat to the ocean is pollution. Fisheries problems are not widely understood;
- Likewise ocean problems are not top of mind environmental concerns;
- People understand that water and fish move around and they do not necessarily understand how to draw boundaries in the ocean;
- Furthermore, people assume a greater level of protection than actually exists

Most Americans Have A Fairly Negative View Of The Overall Health Of The Oceans



Data from October 1999

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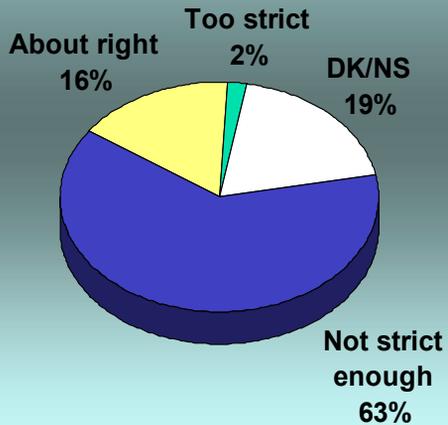
SeaWeb 2001

Now for the detailed findings:

Most Americans have a fairly negative view of the overall health of the oceans with 59% rating the ocean's health only fair or poor and 27% rating it good or excellent. Only 2% think the ocean is in excellent health today.

Nearly Two-Thirds Believe That Regulations Protecting The Ocean Are Too Lax

Are regulations protecting our oceans too strict, about right, not strict enough, or don't you have an opinion on this?



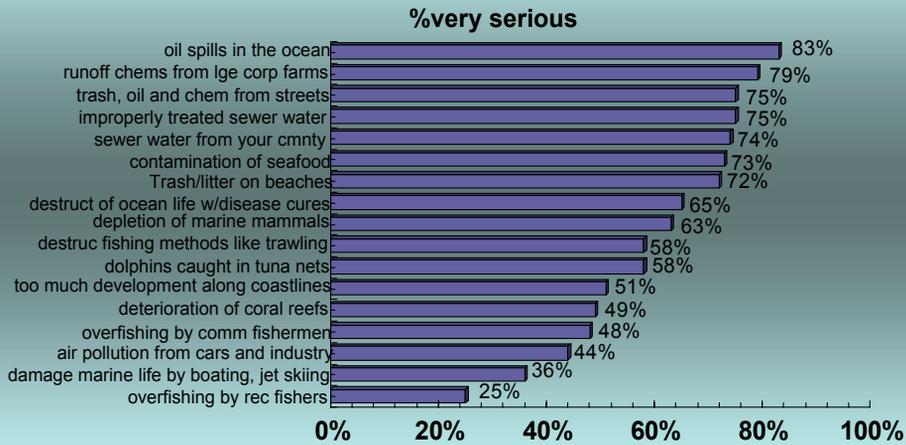
Data from October 1999

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About two-thirds believe regulations protecting the oceans are not strict enough, while only 2% think they are too strict.

Pollution, Contaminated Seafood, And Dirty Beaches Top The List Of Ocean Concerns Recreation-related Concerns Are Seen As Less Serious



Data from October 1999

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When asked to rate a list of possible problems facing the ocean for how serious a threat each problem is, pollution concerns top the list. 83% say oil spills are a very serious threat to the oceans, followed by 79% who say agricultural run-off and 75% who say urban run-off are very serious problems. There is a middle tier of concern comprised of depletion of marine mammals (where 63% say that is a very serious problem), fishing methods like trawling (which 58% say is a very serious problem) and too much coastal development (which 51% find to be a very serious problem). There is very little concern or understanding about recreational overfishing or the use of personal watercraft.

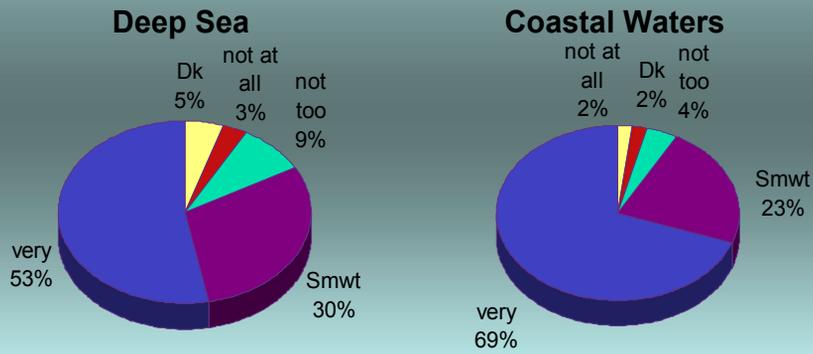
The Pacific Region Is The Most Negative About The Trend In Ocean Quality



When asked whether the health of the oceans has gotten better, stayed the same or gotten worse over the last few years, pluralities or majorities in each region of the country say the ocean's health has gotten worse. The Pacific region (composed of Oregon, Washington and California) is the most negative about the trend in ocean quality with 63% of its residents saying the ocean's health has worsened.

Large Majorities Find The Condition Of Both "Coastal" and "Deep Sea" Waters Important Coastal Waters Are Slightly More Important To Them

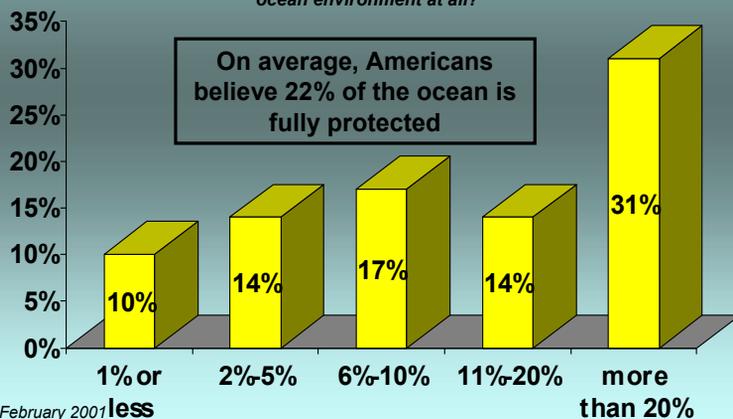
How important is the condition of ____ to you personally -- is it very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important, or haven't you thought much about this?



Americans say both coastal and deep sea waters are personally important to them, although they express somewhat more concern about coastal waters with 69% saying they are very important, than they do about the deep sea which only 53% say are very important.

Americans Believe A Far Greater Percentage of Our Ocean Waters Are Fully Protected Than Actually Are

As you may know, there are different kinds of protected areas in American oceans – some are fully protected and allow no human activities that could harm the ocean environment at all. Other kinds of protected areas have lower levels of protected areas and ban only certain activities. What percentage of U.S. waters do you think are fully protected – that is, allow no human activities that could harm the ocean environment at all?



Data from February 2001

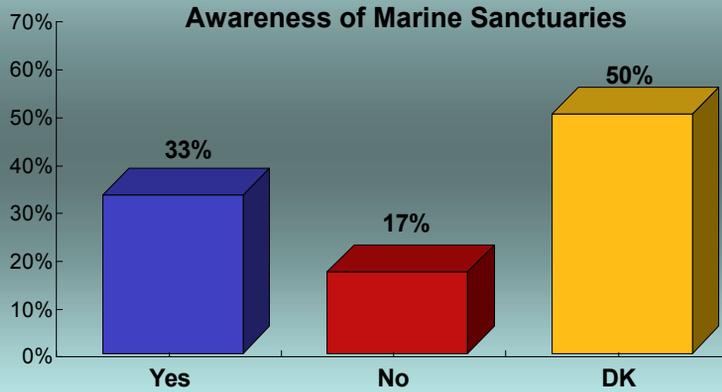
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Americans believe a far greater percentage of the ocean is fully protected than actually is. When asked what percentage of US waters are fully protected from all human activities that could result in harm to the ocean environment, on average, Americans believe 22% of the ocean is accorded that level of protection. Nearly a third of Americans believe over 20% is fully protected.

Only One-Third of Americans Are Even Dimly Aware Of The Existence of Marine Sanctuaries

Do you happen to know whether or not the federal government has established certain areas of the ocean as marine sanctuaries -- or don't you happen to know?



Data from October 1999

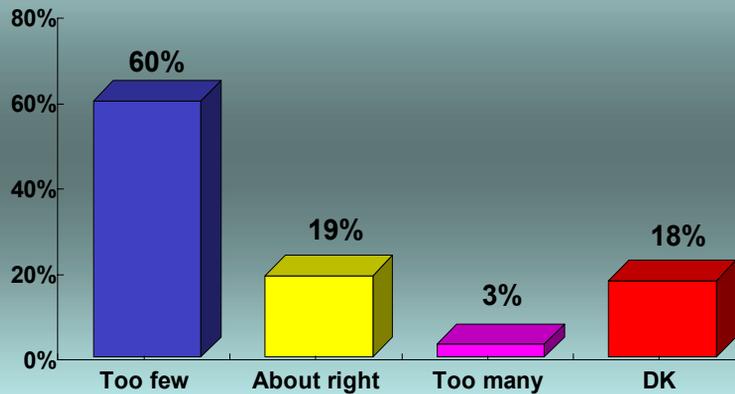
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Only a third of the public is aware that the federal government has established certain areas of the ocean as marine sanctuaries

Most Americans Think There Are Too Few Marine Sanctuaries

Currently there are 12 areas of the ocean in US territorial waters that are designated as marine sanctuaries. Do you think that is too many, about the right number, or too few?



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Data from October 1999

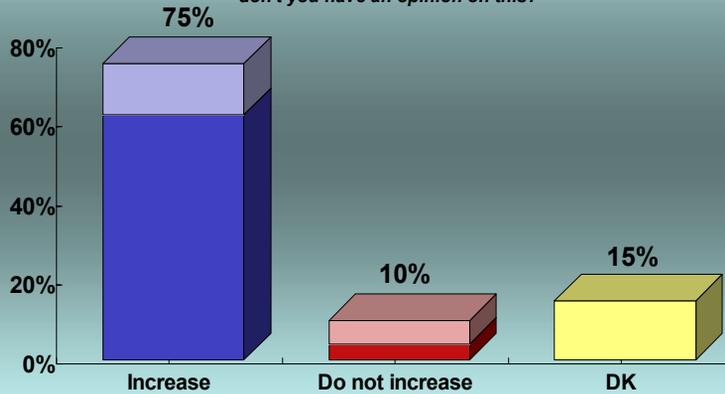
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When told there are 12 marine sanctuaries (which at the time of the poll there were only 12), 60% of Americans think that is too few Sanctuaries while 19% think that sounds about the right number

Support For Strengthening Protections In The 12 Marine Sanctuaries Is Overwhelming

There are currently 12 marine sanctuaries in United States territorial waters which total about 1% of US waters and there are few restrictions on recreational or commercial activities within the sanctuaries. Do you think that we should increase protections that restrict human activities within the sanctuaries or do you think we should not increase protections that restrict human activities within the marine sanctuaries in U.S. waters or don't you have an opinion on this?



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Data from October 1999

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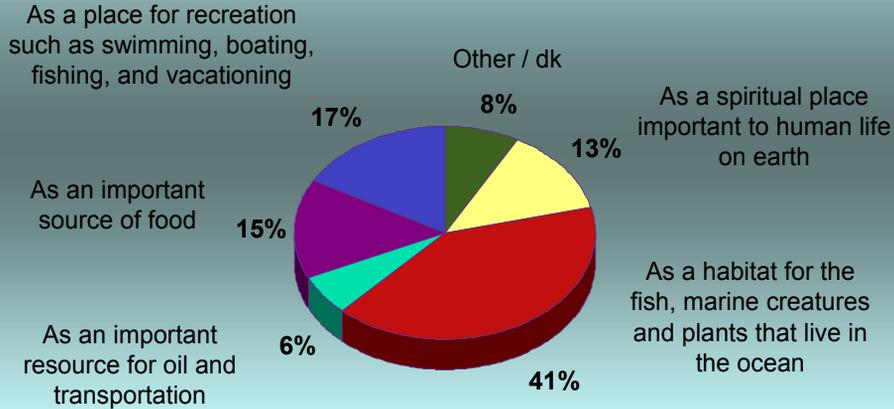
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When told there are few restrictions on recreational or commercial activities within the national marine sanctuaries, 75% of the public support increased protections to restrict human activities within the sanctuaries. Only 10% are opposed to increased restrictions and 15% are not sure how they feel.

A Plurality Think Of The Ocean As A Habitat For Marine Creatures

Only A Minority Think Of The Ocean In Purely Instrumental Terms

Which of the following best describes how you mainly think of the ocean?:



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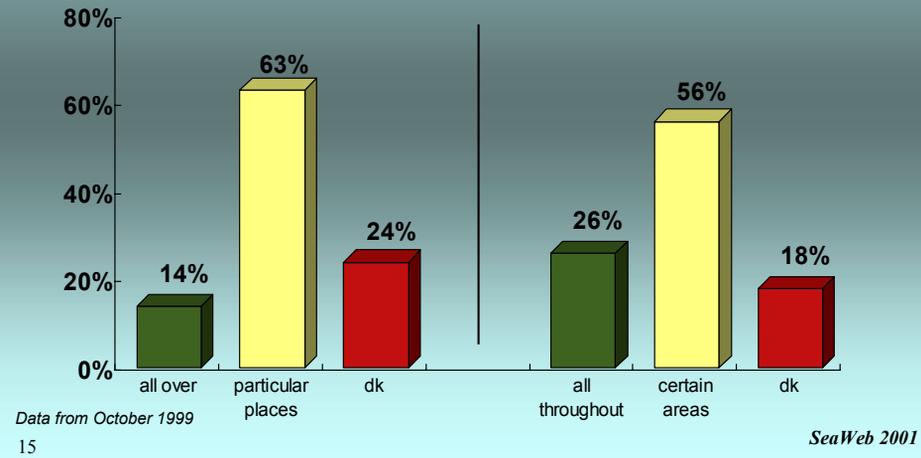
Americans think of the ocean in many ways. For 41%, the ocean is mainly thought of as habitat for the fish, marine creatures and plants that live there. But for 17% it's mainly a place for human recreation and for 15% it's mainly a food source. Another 13% think of the ocean as a spiritual place, simply important to human life.

At The Same Time, People Are Not Sure Exactly How Ocean Systems Work

Most, But Far From All, Think Fish Breeding Grounds And Coral Reefs Are Found Only In Particular Places

As far as you know, do most species of fish breed all throughout the ocean or do various species of fish breed in particular places within the ocean or don't you have an opinion on this?

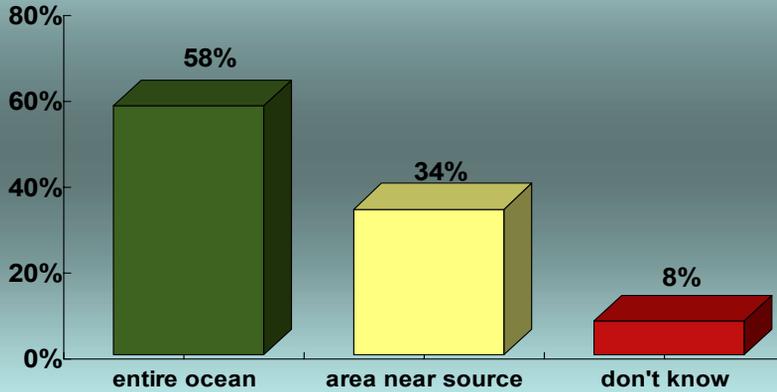
As far as you know, are coral reefs only found in certain areas of the ocean or are they found all throughout the ocean or don't you have an opinion on this?



At the same time, Americans are not sure how oceans work. When asked if most species of fish breed all throughout the ocean or if various species of fish breed in particular places, 63% say fish have particular breeding grounds, but the other third of the public think fish breed everywhere or they are not sure. Likewise, while 56% say they believe coral reefs are only found in certain places, 26% think that coral reefs are found all throughout the ocean and another 18% are not sure.

On The Other Hand, Most Feel That Pollution In One Area Affects The Whole Ocean...

As far as you know, does pollution entering one area of the ocean affect the entire ocean, or does it mostly affect the area of the ocean near the source, or don't you have an opinion on this?



Data from October 1999

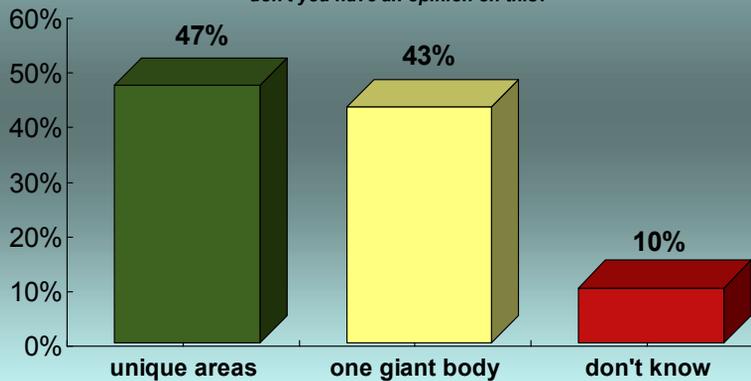
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At the same time, there is a perception that pollution entering the ocean at one point affects the entire ocean (58% believe this) as opposed to mainly affecting the area near the source. Thus, there is a perception that ocean systems and the life they support are highly mobile.

...Which Results In Division On Whether The Ocean Has Unique Areas That Can Be Protected

*Which of the following statements comes closest to your own view:
The ocean, like the land, has certain areas that are unique and can be protected from pollution or overfishing **OR** The ocean is one giant body of water and protecting one particular area of it from pollution or overfishing is useless since anything that is done in one part of the ocean will affect every other part or don't you have an opinion on this?*



Data from October 1999

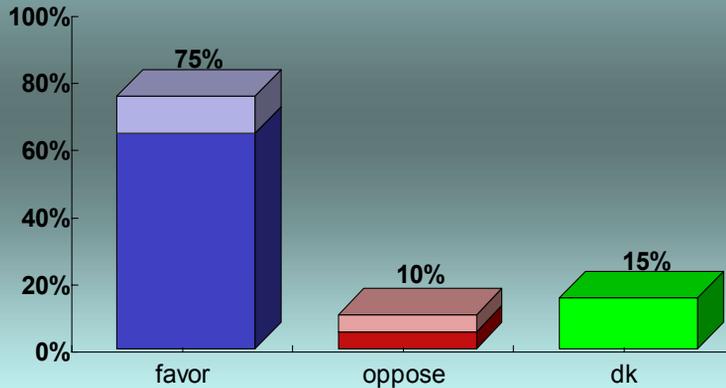
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This leads to some division over how to set aside areas in the ocean. When asked which statement comes closer to their view, 47% agree that the ocean like the land has unique areas that can be protected, while 43% agree with the statement that the ocean is one giant body of water and protecting one area from overfishing or pollution is useless since what is done in one part of the ocean will affect every other part.

Yet, When These Areas Are Described, Support For Protected Areas Is Broad And Strong

Do you favor or oppose the United States having certain areas of the ocean within U.S. territorial waters as ocean protected areas in which activities that can result in pollution, seriously deplete fish or marine life, or damage important underwater habitat such as coral reefs and other special places are limited, or don't you have an opinion on this?



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Data from October 1999

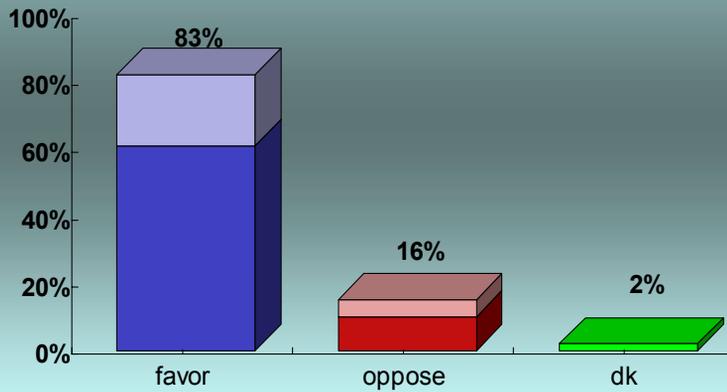
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However, when protected areas are described as areas in which activities that can result in pollution, seriously deplete fish or marine life or damage important underwater habitat, support is broad and deep for establishing such places. 75% support ocean protected areas in this context and only 10% are opposed.

More Recently, We Found Overwhelming Public Support For The Clinton Executive Order On Marine Reserves

Last May, former President Clinton signed an executive order calling on states, local governments and non-governmental organizations to create a system of protected areas in the oceans off the U.S. coasts. Do you favor or oppose this executive order to establish a system of marine protected areas in U.S. waters?



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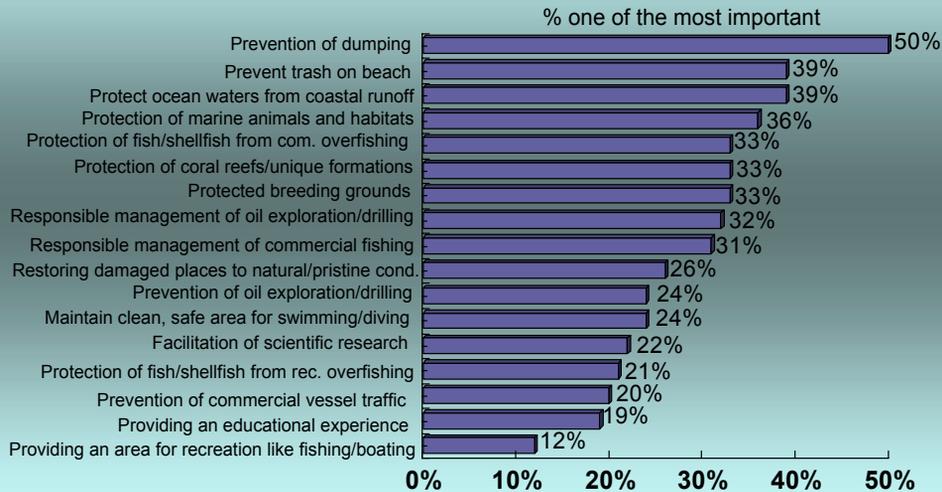
Data from February 2001

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SeaWeb Feb 30 2001

Similarly, 83% favor the Clinton Executive Order to establish a system of Marine Protected Areas in US ocean waters, and 16% are opposed to it.

**Top Goals For Ocean Protected Areas Focus On Dumping And Pollution, Followed By Protection Of Sea Life And Habitats
Middle Tier Goals Focus On Management Of Commercial Enterprise**



Data from October 1999

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When read a list of goals for protected areas and asked to rate each one for how important a goal it is, Americans say preventing dumping, trash on beaches, coastal runoff, protecting marine animals and fish from overfishing and habitat from damage are the top goals for protected areas.

Americans Want Invasive And Extractive Activities Prohibited In Reserves, But Would Allow Low-Impact Recreation

NOT ALLOW

- Trawling 82%
- Disposal of dredged materials 82%
- Collecting tropical fish/coral 71%
- Drilling for oil 65%
- Commercial fishing 59%
- Motorboating 49%
- Sportfishing on commercial charters 46%

Data from October 1999

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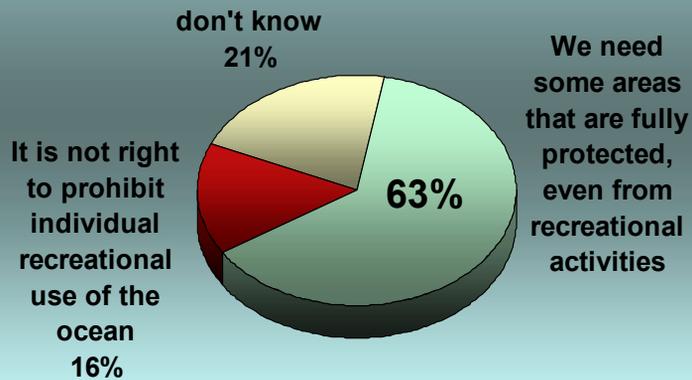
ALLOW

- Scientific research 81%
- Canoeing/sailing 76%
- Scuba diving 74%
- Charter boats for whale watching 55%
- Private sportfishing 49%

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On the whole, Americans would prohibit invasive and extractive activities such as trawling, disposal of dredged materials, collection of tropical fish and coral, drilling for oil and commercial fishing in protected areas. They would allow low-impact recreational activities like canoeing, sailing, scuba diving and whale watching, among others.

Americans See A Value In Fully Protected Marine Reserves With No Exceptions for Even Recreational Activities



Data from February 2001

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Americans see value in setting some areas aside with no exceptions even for recreational activities. Fully 63% agree with the statement that we need some areas in the ocean that are protected from even recreational activities, while 16% say it is not right to prohibit individual recreational use of the ocean.

Recently, A Scientific Consensus Statement About The Effectiveness of Fully Protected Areas Was Issued

Recent analyses by scientists at NCEAS and others made the following conclusions:

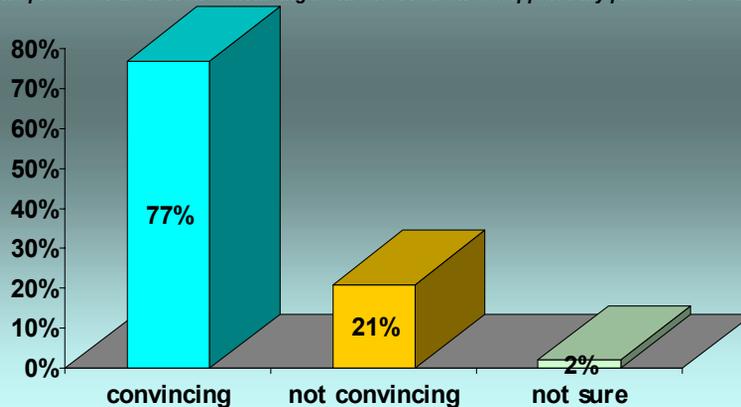
- **There are positive ecological effects *within* reserve boundaries**
- **There are positive ecological effects *outside* reserve boundaries**
- **There are positive ecological effects of reserve *networks***

Last year, a scientific consensus statement about fully protected marine reserves was released which concluded that there are:

- Positive ecological effects within reserves;
- Positive ecological effects outside reserves; and
- Positive ecological effects of reserve networks

The Public Finds Scientific Consensus To Be A Compelling Reason To Support Fully Protected Marine Areas

Leading marine scientists issued a statement recently saying that we need fully protected ocean areas that prohibit all invasive and extractive human activities, both recreational and commercial. These scientists say that the research shows that full protection in these areas leads to more robust and diverse marine life within the area, and also provides greater benefits to ocean habitat and marine life outside the protected area. How convincing is this as a reason to support fully protected ocean areas?



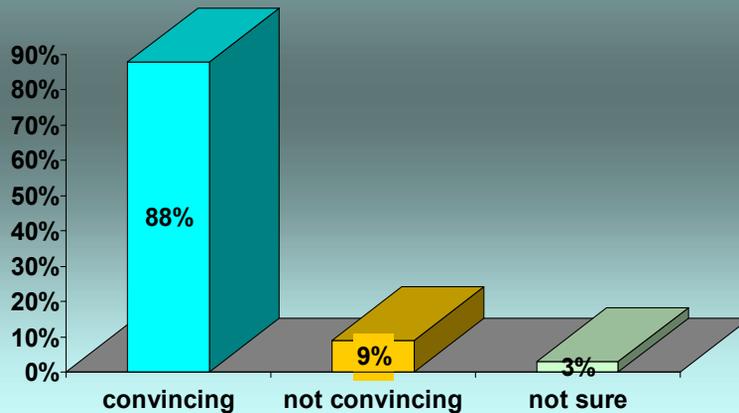
Data from February 2001
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When read a statement that “leading marine scientists have said we need fully protected ocean areas that prohibit all invasive and extractive activities both recreational and commercial because science shows that full protection in these areas leads to more robust and diverse marine life within the area and provides greater benefits to ocean habitat and marine life outside the area,” 77% of the public find this a convincing reason to support the creation of fully protected marine reserves.

A Simple Statement That We Protect Less Than 1% Of Our Ocean Waters Is Very Compelling To The Public

Currently, we only protect less than 1% of US waters. To preserve this beautiful resource, we need to protect more. How convincing is this as a reason to support fully protected ocean areas?



Data from October 1999
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Further, 88% of the public says the simple fact that the US protects less than 1% of its ocean waters is a convincing reason to support the creation of fully protected marine reserves.