

# The Oceans Under Serious Threat

We hear often of environmental damage to the oceans and to fish. Read the well-known writer and activist **Fr Shay Cullen SSC** and keep it in mind on your next walk by the sea



Island of Palawan,  
Indonesia

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The island of Palawan in the Philippines is considered an environmental haven of cleanliness and beauty. But what was discovered recently in the fish market of Puerto Princesa – a dorado fish, one of many they say, with a belly full of plastic wastes such as bottle caps, candy wrappers and a yellow plastic spoon – shocked the customers in the fish market. Other fish vendors said they frequently find similar plastic trash in the fish.

Besides pollution, there are big losses to small-scale fishers in coastal

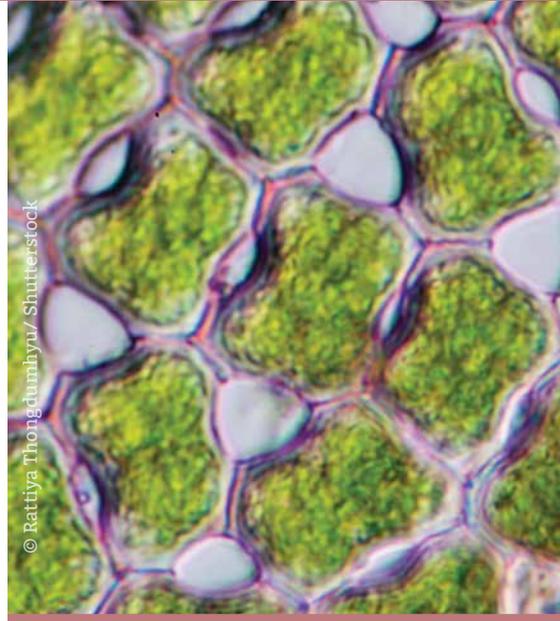
communities in recent years due to the proliferation of commercial fishing fleets and factory ships of other nations. Not only is China grabbing the fishing grounds of the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations but huge fishing fleets run by corporations dominate the ocean. They are destroying the oceans by irresponsible 'bottom trawling' and many fish species are needlessly killed. The ships drag huge nets along the ocean floor destroying everything in their paths, destroying corals and

ecosystems and habitats of fish. The commercial fishing industry kills between 0.97 and 1.97 trillion wild fish worldwide every year. This is called 'by-catch' and 'accidental take'.

For example, every hour 30,000 sharks are killed. That is 50 to 70 million sharks every year, hauled on board, fins cut off and they are thrown back to die, all to delight diners with shark fin soup. This is a barbaric attack against nature and unsustainable. The shark is a magnificent creature, evolved after millions of years of evolution into the perfect ocean hunter and essential to maintaining balance in the ocean's wildlife. This mass killing has caused a 70 per cent decline in shark populations globally over the past 50 years, making them an endangered species.

Watching the well-made and convincing documentary on the state of our oceans by researcher Ali Tabrizi called *Seaspiracy* shown on Netflix and excerpts on YouTube, we can see how the oceans are under threat. It has caused many people to question the methods of the commercial fishing industry that result in over-fishing the oceans.

What is revealed is so shocking. It is enough to cause people to stop eating fish and turn to organic plant-based food, this writer among them. We need to stop eating so much meat and fish to save the planet and the oceans. The oceans are vital to life on earth as they make up 71 per cent of the planet's surface. They are the greatest absorbers of carbon dioxide.



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Phytoplanktons are the micro-organisms, the microscopic plants, that make up the basic food of the ocean's food chain and they are rapidly diminishing. Forty percent have been lost since the 1950s, studies show. This is due to the warming of the oceans due to climate change and global warming. These micro-organisms are responsible for absorbing carbon dioxide and giving off oxygen for us and the animals to breath. They are more effective than all the trees on the planet and now they are threatened by human activity. We humans refuse to save ourselves and stop burning coal, oil and everything that burns. We are the world's most dangerous arsonists.

The fishing industry has another huge negative impact on the planet and the oceans – the discarded and



Phytoplankton  
under the microscope

lost nets. Likely, millions of tons of nets are floating in the oceans entangling dolphins, whales and thousands of other sea creatures including turtles. They wash up on beaches everywhere. According to Greenpeace, 'More than 640,000 tonnes of nets, lines, pots and traps used in commercial fishing are dumped and discarded in the sea every year, the same weight as 55,000 double-decker buses.'

'We hear a lot about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP). . . 46 per cent of it is discarded fishing nets, which are far more dangerous for marine life than our plastic straws. Straws are only 0.003 per cent of the garbage in the ocean. We have to do more than ban plastic straws.'

Every fishing boat must be held accountable for their missing fishing

gear. Another danger to the oceans and all the fish there is longline fishing. These are long fishing lines that carry hundreds of hooks with bait and they catch everything indiscriminately. Turtles, dolphins, whales and even sea birds get caught. The fish caught are mostly thrown back dead. The hooks and lines are frequently lost and left to float underwater for years and continue killing and maiming sea creatures.

The strongest defenders of the so-called 'sustainable' fishing industry are some NGOs that promote sustainable fishing. Some claim that the canned tuna we see on supermarket shelves are 'dolphin-safe'. The documentary *Seaspiracy* showed that in most cases the canned tuna was not dolphin-safe. Many of the NGOs cannot be critical of the industry that funds them or be unbiased.

I used to think that fish farming was the best answer. But this, too, has many problems. The fish packed in underwater cages develop diseases and antibiotics are used that can affect the consumer. Sea lice is a big problem in fish farms and dangerous chemicals (several are banned) are needed to control it. So the farmed fish are also of low quality due to the feeds or pellets they are fed.

Again, it is greed that causes the overfishing, pollution, the plastic and chemicals poured into our oceans that is destroying our planet. We need greater awareness, widespread effective law enforcement on the sea and a moral conscience to stop the abusive and destructive fishing. ♡