

# NEWS

## Ocean Sustainability Issues Are Focus of Industry Gathering

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How can industry operate in the oceans sustainably? Is there a broadly agreed upon definition of sustainability? How can industry and others deal with conflicting uses in the oceans? These were among the questions explored at a recent ocean industry leadership conference that brought together several hundred participants from business, nongovernmental organizations, and governments from around the world.

At the Sustainable Ocean Summit 2013, held 23–24 April in Washington, D. C., topics ranged from ocean policy in international waters to the potential impacts of marine sound on animals to challenges and opportunities for responsible industries in the Arctic region, which is becoming more ice free and opening up to increased shipping, tourism, and resource exploration.

During the opening panel on “Oceans 2050: Sustainable Ocean—Sustainable Business,” representatives from industries including shipping, oil and gas, fisheries, and aquaculture focused on how to operate economically strong businesses while minimizing adverse environmental impacts.

Gary Isaksen, manager of global ocean science and policy with ExxonMobil, which is a founding member of the World Ocean Council (WOC), said the significance of the meeting is “to make sure that the companies that have shown leadership to be involved with [WOC] are trying to come to a common understanding of what each of us feels about ocean leadership, sustainability, sustainable ocean use.” He said that as his company works in new areas, including in the Arctic, it is important to “as far as we can, leave it as we found it; in other words, make sure we have very solid programs in place for marine life [and] safety.” WOC, an alliance that was established to bring together the ocean business community around corporate ocean responsibility issues, organized the summit and sponsored an earlier summit in 2010.

In response to concerns that some in the fishing industry have about the potential impact to the marine environment of sound, including seismic testing used in oil and gas exploration, Isaksen said ExxonMobil “is very careful to make sure that we minimize any impacts on marine life.” He added, “Naturally, fishermen would think: Here comes a seismic program and it’s going to scare away or kill fish larvae.” Isaksen said that more science is needed to understand whether and how sound affects marine life. He noted that ExxonMobil is working on the issue through

its involvement with the E&P [Exploration and Production] Sound and Marine Life Joint Industry Program.

Mikael Thinghuus, chief executive officer for Royal Greenland, a seafood producer, said, “I don’t think the seismic investigations have much impact on fishing. That’s my personal opinion not shared by thousands of people in little boats.” He said that while extractive industries and fishing may not often be thought of as being able to work cooperatively, perhaps information gleaned from oil exploration could help Greenlandic fisheries expand beyond traditional areas. “This is where knowledge from the oil exploration actually comes in, because you guys need to know what is underneath the seabed, and actually we just need to know pretty much how the seabed looks,” Thinghuus said, adding that “a very simple practical example of something that could be a really bad story, the seismology [testing], maybe ends up as a good story, which is enabling us to fish more in a sustainable way.”

With regard to sustainability, Thinghuus said, “If you live in a world where you only care about the environment and forget about the people dimension, you do a disservice to humanity and I think you won’t get anything through on a bigger scale. There are several billion people who need food, who need energy.”

Robert Orr, chief executive officer for Cuna del Mar, a private equity firm that invests in

open ocean aquaculture technology and platforms, said the view of the fund is that neither the current wild fisheries nor the current aquaculture organizations and practices are environmentally sustainable. About 88 million tons of fish and seafood are now harvested annually from wild fisheries, and an additional 60 million tons are produced from aquaculture; the forecasted demand for 2030 is for 100 million more tons, most of which will need to come from aquaculture, he said. Noting that factory farming methods applied to aquaculture are “a dismal failure,” he said there has to be a better, technology-driven solution to allow effective, efficient, and sustainable offshore farming. “We don’t know what the answers are, but the answers have to be different than what they are today.”

Steve Carmel, senior vice president for Maersk Line, Limited, a maritime company, outlined two definitions of sustainability. The first, which he labeled the weak form and which he tends to favor, “says there is some aggregate stock of capital, both natural and manmade, that must be maintained to advance humanity’s march forward. That recognizes that there are trade-offs that can be made.” Carmel noted that the “strong” form of sustainability says that there are certain ecological principles that cannot be violated under any circumstances. “That obviously leads to a very different set of decision criteria and obviously conflict in the way we view sustainability,” he said. “The question is, How do we come to agreement outside of that?”

### Global Ocean Commission

A session on the summit’s second day featured several cochairs of the Global Ocean Commission (GOC), an independent body



(left to right) Paul Holthus, executive director of the World Ocean Council; Global Ocean Commission (GOC) cochair José María Figueres, former president of Costa Rica; and GOC cochair Trevor Manuel, a South African cabinet member, at the Sustainable Ocean Summit. Photo copyright Liz Lynch. Used by permission, courtesy of GOC.

launched in February that is preparing recommendations to reverse degradation of the high seas and restore ocean health and productivity. GOC is planning to issue a handful of key recommendations about overfishing, habitat and biodiversity loss, the lack of effective ocean management and enforcement, and deficiencies in the governance of the high seas in the second quarter of 2014 prior to United Nations General Assembly discussions in September on protecting the biodiversity of the high seas.

"We are not looking for backslapping support," said GOC cochair Trevor Manuel, South African cabinet minister. "What the [GOC] is saying to you today is, to preserve your way of life and your means of life, and to be sure that we can maintain what we have of the oceans to leave sufficient for our children,

you've got to join in." He continued, "We also want to work for the broadest agreement of everybody. The global ocean is that part of the world that is effectively outside of sovereign governance. We must act in a way that can embrace the largest cross-section of rational people in the world."

GOC cochair José María Figueres, former president of Costa Rica, emphasized to summit participants that proper regulatory frameworks and protections for the ocean would be good for business. "When it comes to the high seas, we are in a gray area with respect to so many different issues," he said, noting that gray areas are bad for markets because they do not thrive without clear regulatory frameworks.

"In market terms, we could say today with respect to the oceans, we are long on science because we know a lot about the science of

the oceans, but we are short on policy because policy has not followed what we know in terms of science," he said. "Addressing that market gap between long on the science and short on the policy is a principle objective of this commission." Figueres said the commission hopes that a handful of concrete and very specific recommendations could be the impetus to "get this [ocean] issue back on the agenda where it belongs" and moving in the right direction. "At the end of the day, there is no planet B. We either get this right and fix it and move on to a very different agenda or we are in a hot spot where we don't want to be."

For more information, see <http://www.oceancouncil.org> and <http://www.globaloceancommission.org>.

—RANDY SHOWSTACK, Staff Writer