

U.S. States Taking Ocean-Climate Action Joint Statement

December 9, 2019

The wellbeing of all people depends on a healthy ocean and healthy waters. From producing oxygen and absorbing heat and carbon dioxide to supporting security, tourism, food production, and trade, the ocean is vital for communities and economies.

Climate change and its effects, including acidification, deoxygenation, ocean warming, and sea level rise, are already having serious ramifications on the ocean and the billions of people who rely on it. As outlined in the recent IPCC Special Report on Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, we recognize that the science is clear -- we will continue to see transformative impacts to our ocean, living resources, and communities without immediate action.

We are witnessing these consequences firsthand on our coasts and shores: Along the east coast of Maryland and Virginia, acidification is negatively impacting our fisheries, flooding is jeopardizing our communities, and sea level rise is exacerbating the threat to tidal marshes. In Hawaii, climate related marine heatwaves and associated coral bleaching has resulted in significant coral loss throughout the Islands over the past five-years, while ocean acidification poses an additional and increasing threat to these ecosystems. Along the shores of Rhode Island, sea level rise, storm surge, tidal flooding, and coastal erosion are impacting infrastructure, coastal property owners, and the social, environmental and cultural assets of the Ocean State. In Washington and California, ocean acidification has damaged shellfish aquaculture, and climate change has triggered marine heat waves, deoxygenation and harmful algal blooms, and have hurt fisheries, tourism, and wildlife – affecting the entire West Coast.

As leaders, we are dedicated to confronting the threat to our climate, ocean, and coastal communities. That is why each of our states recognizes that we must:

- Decrease greenhouse gas emissions overall and ocean-specific emissions, such as those associated with shipping and other ocean-based industries, including carbon dioxide emissions, which drive ocean acidification and storm intensification;
- Increase ocean-related mitigation, through actions such as protecting and restoring “blue carbon” ecosystems, including seagrass meadows, saltmarshes, kelp and mangrove forests;
- Facilitate the development of clean and renewable energy that is balanced and diverse;
- Increase the resilience of coastal ecosystems, communities, and economies through proactive planning and response;
- Reduce stressors on the ocean, such as increasing the use of living shorelines, managing fisheries sustainably, minimizing the risk of spills, reversing habitat degradation and reducing nutrient pollution.

Without action, the impacts of climate change on our ocean will become increasingly challenging and costly. Each of our states is committed to taking action on the ocean and climate. But we can't do it alone. Our states are working collaboratively with each other and other governments to take action through forums such as the U.S. Climate Alliance and the International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification. We call on all countries, including the United States, to increase their overall climate ambition and to make strong commitments to the actions identified above, such as by updating their nationally determined contributions to be “ocean-smart.”

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