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**For Immediate Release**

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## **“Voices for the Ocean”**

### **Alaska Fishermen Send Urgent Aerial Message made of Boats & Buoys: Protect oceans and fisheries from acid impact of fossil fuel exhaust.**

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The “Voices for the Ocean” event will bring together commercial fishermen and other mariners in Homer, Alaska, on Sunday, September 6, 2009 to celebrate the ocean’s bounty and defend it from harmful fossil fuel emissions.

Lead organizers of the event are Alan Parks, a Homer commercial fisherman and outreach coordinator for the Alaska Marine Conservation Council (AMCC), and Brad Warren, ocean health director for the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP).

International Aerial Artist John Quigley ([www.SpectralQ.com](http://www.SpectralQ.com)) will create the aerial image in collaboration with the AMCC, SFP and representatives from Alaskan coastal fishing communities. Boats & buoys will form the message on the water. They will be photographed & videotaped from the air and the resulting images will circulate worldwide through media and allied organizations.

Afterward, participants and community members will gather in Homer for a community seafood feast. Speakers and participants will call on state, national, and international leaders to protect the ocean from the acidifying, oxygen-depleting, and climate-altering impacts of uncontrolled fossil fuel emissions.

The after-party will include expert speakers on ocean acidification, climate change, and practical steps that fishermen, seafood lovers, and other citizens can take to protect the oceans that supply food for 3 billion people. The seafood industry is Alaska’s largest private-sector employer, generating more than 56,000 jobs (not counting “indirect” jobs in related sectors).

“Fishermen and others who depend on Alaska’s rich marine resources are coming together as one voice in support of reducing fossil fuel consumption and moving to a renewable energy future. This is the only real solution to ocean acidification and the time to act is right now,” said Alan Parks.

Fishermen and ocean advocates have a limited time to press for deep emissions-reduction targets. The U.S. Senate is expected to enact climate legislation during late 2009, aiming to have a law passed in time for a United Nations treaty conference in December. At that conference nations will gather to approve the next-generation climate treaty to strictly limit global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in order to avoid catastrophic climate and ocean impacts. Scientists have warned repeatedly that failure to agree on dramatic emissions reductions at this time will likely push Earth's climate and oceans past "tipping points" that may commit human civilization to irreversible harm.

The initiative brings together fishing and conservation groups that are often at odds on other issues. "Many of us have different views about how to govern fisheries," said Brad Warren, former editor of the trade journal *Pacific Fishing*, who now runs a program on ocean health for the Sustainable Partnership. "But everybody can agree we need an ocean can continue to produce abundant harvests. That's why we're involved."

Participants in the Homer event are urging Alaska's political leaders to take a strong stand against acidification, which some scientists have dubbed the "evil twin" of global climate change.

Acidification is caused by billions of tons of carbon dioxide that rise from smokestacks and tailpipes every year and mix into the sea. In seawater, the gas forms an acid that attacks the foundation of marine food webs. Thus the same pollution that drives climate change also undercuts fisheries around the world, especially in the vulnerable North Pacific off Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, which produce more than two thirds of the U.S. seafood harvest. The North Pacific is a global repository for carbon dioxide in the oceans.

Quigley said, "This 'Message from the Sea' is a call for people around the world to join in a visual declaration to urge leaders to immediately adopt a treaty that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, stabilizes the climate, and protects the ocean."

"Alaska's senators know that ocean acidification is a looming danger to our fisheries," said Parks. "This message from fishermen is intended to support our leaders in taking the necessary action now to reduce carbon emissions. Time is of the essence."

The resulting aerial art image will be presented to Alaska senators who have a significant roll in shaping U.S. Energy and Climate Change policy, and to other key policy makers.

Supporters of the Homer event include the Alaska Marine Conservation Council (AMCC), the National Fisheries Conservation Center, the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP), and many participants from the fishing industry, Alaska coastal communities, and conservation groups.

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## FACTS ABOUT OCEAN ACIDIFICATION

### **The Process of Ocean Acidification**

In the past 200 years the oceans have absorbed about one fourth of the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) produced by human activities like fossil fuel burning. As CO<sub>2</sub> mixes into seawater, it forms carbonic acid. Since the Industrial Revolution, fossil fuel emissions have increased the acidity of the surface oceans—the upper few hundred meters where nearly all fish and marine mammals live—by an average of 30% worldwide. If emissions continue to increase on current trends, the oceans will become more acidic than at any time in the past 20 million years.

### **Why Does Ocean Acidification Matter?**

Ocean acidification has been called a sister problem to climate change because it is caused by the same human-caused production of large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>. Its impacts are additional to, and may exacerbate, the effects of climate change, including but not limited to:

- Altering the biodiversity of the world's marine ecosystems and affecting the total productivity of the oceans.
- An increasingly acidic environment causing problems in high-latitude marine ecosystems.
- Depleted levels of calcium carbonate in the ocean, thinning the “nutrient soup” from which many marine organisms build themselves. A decrease of 50% is now projected within just a few decades, not centuries like previously thought.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's scenarios predict that by 2050, organisms in the polar oceans will face levels of acidity that cause serious calcium carbonate shortages.
- Earliest impacts of ocean acidification are expected in polar and sub-polar waters and the upwelling region along the North American Pacific coast.
- Some of the most vulnerable organisms are important food sources for many important fish species, such as salmon. Pteropods, for example, are small planktonic snails that may already be dissolving in Alaskan waters below about 100 meters deep, based on preliminary laboratory findings.
- Clams, oysters and crabs will be directly impacted by reductions in calcium carbonate. Most fish populations will be affected indirectly as acidification impacts their key prey species.
- The effects of increasing acidity on the oceans will last for thousands of years since the oceans cycle very slowly. According to researchers from the Royal Society (the British equivalent of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences), “Reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to the atmosphere appears to be the only practical way to minimize the risks of large-scale and long term changes to the oceans”.
- CO<sub>2</sub>-driven acidification presents an especially urgent concern for Alaska and the West Coast. In this region, acid concentrations have built up decades earlier than scientists expected, reaching levels that can kill many marine organisms.

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