

[Click to Print](#)

Feb, 14, 2009

Good news on the ocean front for a change

By RANDOLPH E. SCHMID / AP Science Writer

CHICAGO -- Some Pacific island countries are successfully protecting their reefs, haddock and scallops are recovering in New England waters and a few types of whales are even making a comeback.

"The news today is that there is good news" for the oceans, Nancy Knowlton of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History told a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science on Friday.

That doesn't mean that people no longer need to be concerned about the future of the oceans and sea life, but she said it is time to move beyond the obituaries and recognize there is also progress.

Australia has protected large parts of the Great Barrier Reef, and areas of the Northern Line Islands in the Pacific Ocean retain healthy reefs with large populations of living coral, said Jeremy C.B. Jackson of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Their comments came at a symposium entitled "Fish Tales: Some Success for a Change."

Coral communities protected from overfishing are better able to resist global warming, Jackson added. They may bleach like other corals, but the protected ones bounce back, he said.

The new marine monument protected areas announced by the Bush administration in the Pacific are a step in the right direction, he said, "but they are still only lines on a map."

Still, he is encouraged by President Barack Obama. "It's going to take a while, because this is a serious business, but the commitment is there in this administration."

Developing countries don't always have the luxury of protecting their fishing areas, commented Joshua E. Cinner of James Cook University in Australia. But, he added, some succeed using such measures as closing rotating areas to fishing.

"People comply, in part, because they can see direct benefits," he said.

John Hogevar of Greenpeace USA, based in Austin, Texas, said the ban on whaling observed by most countries since 1986 has given whales "a chance to avoid extinction." Indeed, he added, humpbacks and some gray and right whales are coming back.

Andrew A. Rosenberg of the University of New Hampshire said scallop and haddock stocks in New England waters have recovered dramatically and are now being sustainably harvested.

"The problem is, we don't manage fish stocks, we manage fishermen, and it's hard to change human behavior," he said.

So, if some sea life is recovering but others still need protection, what should people eat and what should they avoid?

Eat sardines and anchovies and environmentally raised shellfish, Jackson said. "And if you like whitefish eat tilapia, put a good sauce on it, and it will taste good."

Avoid farmed salmon, he added, and "every time I see someone eating bluefin tuna, it's like a mortal sin."