

HOME NEWS TRIBUNE CENTRAL JERSEY

Oceans require global vision

There is some comfort in the fact that two vastly different commissions charged with studying our oceans -- one composed mostly of environmentalists and one mostly of business and industry types -- have reached remarkably similar conclusions. The downside is that the unanimity is less a reflection of intersecting beliefs than it is of the crisis facing our oceans.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, a fairly conservative group appointed by President Bush, last week issued a report with more than 200 policy recommendations. The report was similar to one issued by the Pew Commission last year. Both were a grim accounting of the myriad stresses on the ocean environment, everything from overfishing and overdevelopment to toxic farm-water runoff and industrial pollution.

Two hundred policy recommendations will take time to digest. But the president's commission made several general

recommendations that are worth pursuing vigorously, among them a proposal to limit the power of the regional fisheries by forcing them to adopt fishing limits set by scientists, not the fishing industry.

The report also suggests establishing a National Ocean Council that, much like the Homeland Security Department, would oversee and coordinate the varied and sometimes competing interests governing ocean policy. This recommendation was similar in spirit to the commission's proposal to begin to see the ocean as a whole by judging its health not by the number of any species in it at one time but by how the ecosystem as a whole is faring.

New Jersey has learned the hard way that local interests cannot govern areas that have regional impact. Likewise, the fate of the nation's oceans cannot be left to a patchwork of state and federal laws and the competing interests that guide them.