

# *South Florida* **Sun-Sentinel**

## **Ocean Report Sounds Alarm**

**W**ith water on three sides of the state, the report of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy should be of particular interest to Floridians. The report paints a bleak picture unless major steps are taken to protect fisheries and prevent pollution from further degrading ocean resources.

While a few skeptics may still scoff at scientific research that warns of potential disaster from atmospheric warming due to the burning of fossil fuels, it's impossible to deny the impact of human activity on the oceans.

South Floridians have experienced them directly. The reefs off shore are deteriorating. Game fish are becoming harder and harder to catch. Polluted waters have led to the closing of beaches.

In South Florida alone, the economic impact of fishing and recreational use of the oceans is \$4.4 billion a year. Protecting the ocean and its resources is the right thing to do for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is maintaining the economic health of communities up and down the nation's coasts.

The commission's report is too important to be read by a few people, and then put on a shelf to gather dust. With a growing

population, the degradation of ocean resources will accelerate unless substantive steps are taken to better manage fisheries, limit development in sensitive coastal areas, and curtail the runoff of pollutants.

The report has already made it into the presidential arena. Sen. John Kerry, as the all-but-certain Democratic nominee for the presidency, has used it to call for better enforcement of environmental regulations.

The White House has declared President Bush is "firmly committed" to protecting the nation's coastal resources. Left-wing environmental whackos abound, but the report can't be dismissed as their creation, since commission members were appointed by Bush.

Given the long coastline of Florida, political leaders from Key West to Pensacola need to acquaint themselves with the report's findings and recommendations, but leaders from inland states need to take note as well.

Pollutants from Missouri and Kansas flow through rivers to the ocean. Saving the coastal waters of the United States will require a national commitment, and preserving the world's ocean resources will require a global effort.