

## Acidic Oceans

**Aside from the larger topic of global warming at the conference in Copenhagen, acidification of the world's oceans goes largely unnoticed.**

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The climate talks in Copenhagen are now underway, but a side issue that isn't nearly discussed enough is the problem of ocean acidification.

I've written on this topic before>>

It's a huge concern for the world's coral reefs. It's estimated that as CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere increase and the world's oceans become increasingly acidic, corals and other marine creatures will have an increasingly harder time forming their calcareous skeletons. Many species may actually see their calcareous constructions disintegrate slowly as acidity increases.

There is a great deal of controversy in the press regarding the climate talks, which I will not comment on here. However, few are questioning the threat ocean acidification poses to the world's oceans.

Here are some interesting facts about ocean acidification that have been presented at the conference (this excerpt was compiled from the report titled "Ocean Acidification: The Facts," released by the European Project on Ocean Acidification): Currently, each year the ocean absorbs approximately 25 percent of all CO<sub>2</sub> we emit. The increasing volume and rate of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is progressively impacting the ocean system by increasing sea water acidity. Ocean acidity has increased by 30 percent since the beginning of the industrial revolution. The rate of acidification will accelerate in the future. Animals with calcium carbonate skeletons or shells will be affected by ocean acidification.

Interestingly, a recent study carried out by Justin Ries, a researcher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, suggests not all of these effects will be negative, as some species will actually benefit from increased ocean acidity, apparently having an easier time constructing calcium carbonate structures under such conditions.

Of course, this isn't an argument for not doing anything to prevent damage to species that will be negatively affected. The study also found that increasing ocean acidity is likely to affect the food web and have numerous negative consequences.

Reef aquarists know all too well how important pH is for their reef aquariums. The same is true for the world's oceans. Hopefully, we'll be able to find a way to mitigate the damage our actions are likely to cause.

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