

Dealing With Climate Grief.

Welcome to the next in my series of notes on dealing with Climate Grief. Are you feeling despondent about the climate crisis and the future of our planet, worried about what lies ahead for our children and our children's children? Despairing at the lack of action by governments and the tendency of so many people to ignore the situation or believe the disinformation being peddled by fossil fuel interests? Very understandable. But we know that by starting to take some positive action, we can move from despair and powerlessness to feeling that we have some control over the situation. While still acknowledging our grief over the damage and threat to our planet we can have a shared vision of how our world can and must be. If we act now and over the next few years, we can mitigate the worst impacts of Climate Change and help create a better, happier and healthier world.

Welcome to Dealing with Climate Grief – “Rewilding the Seas”.

The oceans occupy two thirds of the world's surface and unlike the land where life (and food sources) occupy only the top metre or so, the seas are deep. The seas can provide much of the food that the human population needs, it provides great biodiversity and captures huge amounts of carbon.

Yet we are destroying this important resource, by over-fishing, wasting much of what is caught, wrecking ocean beds and by use of damaging techniques. We are eating into the breeding stocks of larger fish. 90% of fish populations are either over-fished or fished to capacity.

We continue to pollute the sea with our waste, discharging sewage and plastic waste and micro-plastics into the oceans.

Intensive fish farming using unsustainable techniques has resulted in destruction of coastal habitats such as mangroves and seagrass meadows, the nurseries for many fish and other creatures. Crowded crops result in disease, treated with antibiotics and disinfectant which spreads into surrounding waters. Fish such as salmon are frequently fed on huge amounts of baitfish from the oceans, which deprive wild fish populations. Effluent from fish farms can result in algal blooms in shallow seas.

What can be done?

No-Fish Zones.

Currently there are over 17,000 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) but these occupy less than 7% of the oceans. A greater proportion of the ocean needs to be designated and enforced as no-fish zones, thus allowing individual fish to grow older and larger. These produce much higher numbers of off-spring than smaller fish. These then repopulate the surrounding areas and after a relatively few years, fish stocks recover and fishermen are able to catch more fish for food. We can live of the interest rather than eat into the capital of our stocks. At the same time, the nursery areas within the no-fish zones, coral reefs, kelp forests, salt marshes, mangroves and seagrass meadows are protected from damage and capture even more carbon from the atmosphere. <https://www.iucn.org/theme/marine-and-polar>

Better fishing methods.

Trawl nets should have emergency exits for non-target species to escape. Dredging of the seabed should be banned. Large predatory fish such as tuna should only be caught by pole and line. By-catch of non-target species which usually die and are thrown back should be avoided by better monitoring and penalties.

End fishing subsidies.

Some governments such as China, USA, The EU, South Korea and Japan pay billions of dollars in subsidies to support unsustainable fishing industries. Even the UK has pledged to subsidise our fishing industry with £75m though that is only small compared with the \$35 billion global subsidy in 2018.

<https://www.climatechangenews.com/2021/07/19/20-years-talks-scrapping-fishing-subsidies-enter-final-stretch/>

Use Sustainable Aquaculture.

Currently aqua-culture provides 82 million tonnes of food, about as much as the 84 million tonnes of wild fish caught from the oceans. If done sustainably it can continue to supply us with food by spreading pens over a wider area and further out to sea to benefit from stronger currents. Fish are kept at lower densities to reduce disease. Biological methods such as using cleaner wrasse to reduce parasites on the food species. Predatory fish can be fed on oils from agricultural crops and insect protein from flies raised on food waste in cities. Mussels and clams can be grown on ropes around the pens while sea cucumbers and urchins can be kept in cages below the pens, feeding on the waste and in turn providing food for humans.

Conserve and harvest Kelp Forests.

Kelp forests provide homes for many marine creatures and also capture huge amounts of carbon. They can be sustainably harvested as a source of bio-energy (using technology to capture carbon dioxide while the kelp is digested). Kelp can also be harvested for food for humans, livestock and fish.

What can we do?

Change your lifestyle habits

Research which fish are most sustainable and eat a wider variety rather than just the top five choices, several of which are over-fished. Choose to eat less popular yet tasty alternatives.

See <https://www.msc.org/uk>.

And <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/news/2021/plenty-more-fish-in-the-sea-why-we-should-choose-more-sustainable-seafood/>

Reduce your use of single use plastics many of which find their way into the oceans. Avoid disposable coffee cups by carrying your own travel cup. Use a refillable water bottle rather than buying bottled water. Take part in litter-picking locally and beach cleans when at the seaside. Join in other plastic free campaigns.

<https://www.citytosea.org.uk/campaign/>

Use your Consumer Power

Encourage your local Fish and Chip Shops to use MSC certified supplies. Support those that do.

When buying farmed fish and shellfish, look for the Aquaculture Stewardship Certificate

<https://www.asc-aqua.org>

Keep asking supermarkets and local shops to reduce plastic packaging and choose loose fruit and vegetables.

Educate ourselves. Find out more about the issues.

<https://europe.oceana.org/en/our-campaigns> is a good starting point. Here is a point of view from outspoken campaigner and journalist George Monbiot. <https://www.monbiot.com/2019/05/15/net-curtains/> and for some balance <https://sustainablefisheries-uw.org/about/> . The truth probably lies somewhere in between!

Lobby

Ask your District and Town Councillors what the Councils are doing to reduce single use plastics in their premises and at events that they control.

Write to your MP to ask what the Government is doing to protect all 64 Marine Protection Areas in UK waters not just a few. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/14/uk-largest-sandbank-dogger-bank-protection-bottom-trawling>

You might also ask when the UK Government intend to set quotas to protect all fish stocks, not just 40%?

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1540172/fishing-news-latest-2022-fishing-quotas-agreed-brexite-update-sustainable-fishing>

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