

World Fisheries Day 2009 Resource for Churches

Introduction

The 21st of November is World Fisheries Day. The World Fisheries Day helps in highlighting the critical importance to human lives, of water and the lives it sustains, both in and out of water. Water forms a continuum, whether contained in rivers, lakes, and ocean. Fish forms an important part of the diets of people around the world, particularly those that live near rivers, coasts and other water bodies. A number of traditional societies and communities are rallied around the occupation of fishing. This societies and people are at risk due to the impacts of overfishing. A recent United Nations study reported that more than two-thirds of the world's fisheries have been overfished or are fully harvested and more than one third are in a state of decline because of factors such as the loss of essential fish habitats, pollution, and global warming.

Prayer

This prayer is suggested for use in church services on Sunday 22nd of November:

Dear God of Creation,

In the beginning, you created the living creatures of our oceans and you blessed them, telling them to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the waters in the seas. We come to you today to ask for help and to express our concerns about the current state of global fisheries. We confess that our fisheries are not being managed sustainably and we pray for your help to become better stewards of your oceans. We pray for species like the Cod, who were once a common eating fish, but are now listed as endangered and stocks have collapsed so significantly they do not appear to be going to recover.

We pray for our large predatory fish that have been the hardest hit. In particular the of blue-fin tuna. Their numbers have dropped by over 80% in the Western Atlantic since the 1960's.

We pray for coral reefs worldwide which are threatened by Climate Change, aquarium collectors, run-off and sedimentation, and for the many poor who depend on these reefs and the fish that breed there for their livelihood.

We pray for the survival of the Great Barrier Reef, that precious gem you have entrusted Australians with. We also pray for the Coral Sea, one of the last pristine tropical marine environments, to be made a Marine Protected area for the sake of the many fish species that thrive there but are threatened elsewhere.

We pray for our sharks, whose numbers have declined by a massive 90% worldwide due to overfishing, with roughly 3 sharks being killed per second. We pray for an end to commercial fishing of shark species, which are particularly vulnerable to overfishing due to their slow reproduction and long life-cycle. In particular, we pray for an end to the lucrative and devastating practice of shark finning worldwide. We are saddened by the way this practice has been allowed to affect even some of the

most pristine areas in the world – including the Cocos Islands in Costa Rica and the Galapagos Islands. We thank you for the bravery of the Costa Rican people in protesting against their government's complicity in the shark finning in their waters by Taiwanese fishermen, despite the fact this was against their law.

We pray for the 'Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery', the largest, and one of the most destructive fisheries in Australia. We pray that the review currently being undertaken will address the significant issues in this fishery. As well as the unsustainable targeting of sharks in this fishery, we pray they will address the issue of bycatch, where over 700 fur seals are being killed each year, as well as our threatened sea lions, albatrosses and dolphins – for no reason. We also pray for a reduction in the fishing quota for the Orange Roughy – known as the old man of the sea; a species that lives for over a hundred years and does not reach maturity until it reaches thirty. Lastly, we ask for the protection of other overfished species from further exploitation.

Lord, we pray for fishing communities in Australia and around the world, who are suffering from the lack of fish caused by decades of overfishing. We pray that the industry will be managed with enough foresight to allow fish stocks to recover and the industry to become sustainable, so that these communities will not have to die forever, and the poor will still have access to this important source of protein.

Lord, in the face of this distressing situation we pray that you will remind us that we are not powerless. We can choose to purchase less vulnerable species of fish such as squid, and to buy fish from sustainable fisheries while avoiding unsustainable fish products such as flake and prawns. We can sign the petition for the Coral Sea to be made a Marine Protected Area and we can support organizations such as the Australian Marine Conservation Society and Sea Shepherd in their work. We can write to our politicians demanding more sustainable fisheries and we can pray for solutions. Remind us to take these actions for the sake of our oceans and our future.

We ask this in Jesus' name,

Amen

Action links:

Review of the 'Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery' – http://www.amcs.org.au/default2.asp?active_page_id=533 Comments are due by the 11th of November.

Coral Sea Petition - <http://www.protectourcoralsea.org.au/>

Sustainable Fish Guide - http://www.marineconservation.org.au/WhatWeDo.asp?active_page_id=238

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