

NFHS Policy Debate Topic Proposal: Oceans

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Proposed Resolutions

1. The United Nations Environment Programme should enforce a resolution to urge member nations to cleanup the world's oceans.
2. The United Nations Environment Programme should enact policies that aid in cleanup of the world's oceans.
3. The United States federal government should substantially increase its development of the world's oceans.
4. The United States federal government should substantially increase its development of oceans.
5. The United States federal government should substantially increase its development or cleanup of oceans.
6. The United States federal government should substantially increase its cleanup of the Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic Ocean or Pacific Ocean.
7. The United States federal government should substantially increase its development of the Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic Ocean or Pacific Ocean.
8. The United States federal government should substantially increase its development of the Indian Ocean.

Introduction

William James once said, “The greatest use for life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.” It is with this spirit that ocean policy should be focused on and debated. Ocean policy is not something that will go away. The issues associated with the world’s oceans have only been exacerbated over the past ten years. Over 90% of the earth’s ocean floor has yet to be charted. Many species have yet to be examined or even discovered. These issues are brought to the surface in an article by CNN of August 17 of last year, “The oceans play a major role in controlling our climate. But we have not learned yet how to use them to cool us off rather than contribute to our overheating. Ocean organisms are said to hold the promise of cures for an array of diseases. An examination of the unique eyes of skate (ray fish) led to advances in combating blindness, the horseshoe crab was crucial in developing a test for bacterial contamination, and sea urchins helped in the development of test-tube fertilization.” Exploration of oceans is not limited to the deep. Many companies and countries are looking at ways to solve the water scarcity crisis and these same entities are wanting to explore the ocean for a possible cure. Other nations are struggling with ways to dispose of nuclear waste. Burying flechettes in the ocean floor has been an enticing option for several countries. However, not enough is known about the ocean floor to fully explore this option.

While exploration is an enticing issue to explore in the realm of the world’s oceans, cleanup could be a more pressing issue. The Pacific Ocean trash vortex or patch is now estimated to be about the size of Texas. The patch affects the shipping routes of several nations in regards to imports and exports. The world’s oceans account for 90% of trade good transport according to the World Ocean Network. In the same report it is estimated that 140 million people depend on the cleanliness of oceans for their jobs whether indirectly or directly. With global climate change, the acidification of the world’s oceans has become a hot topic. It has many wanting to engineer an organism that eats carbon dioxide so that the world’s oceans continue to be a source of oxygen, food, water and employment for generations to come. The next few years are critical. The state of the world’s oceans is deteriorating quickly making this a pressing issue for debate.

As one might have noticed, many of the exploration ideas are linked to the word ‘development’ and not exploration. This was a tradeoff to establish more affirmative and negative ground. Being that so much of the ocean is unknown, it should be easier for affirmatives to access more harms areas using the word ‘development’. Additionally, the word ‘development’ should allow negative teams to access greater ground other than focusing solely on economic issues. Nowhere is this more true than the Indian Ocean region. The region is ripe with economic, security and political issues that can be accessed both on the affirmative and negative sides of the debate.

Key Issues

Timeliness

The time for oceans is now. Although the topic of oceans was last debated in 2003-2004, the topic was limited to marine resources. Introducing the direct aspects of cleanup and/or development addresses the issues that have surfaced since the topic was debated 10 years ago. There have been many developments since this topic was debated that make it viable for debate now. Many will argue that many of the same affirmative cases can be accessed again. While this is a valid argument, I would say that the issues have amplified in magnitude and the addition of new terminology and political problems have made this a fresher debate, one that is ready to be debated again.

First, one only need look at the changing face of the population of the globe. According to the World Ocean Network, 50% of the world's population lives on the coast and by 2025 that number will rise to 75%. The pollution of our world's oceans directly contributes to the livelihood of these people in several ways. Most notably and most pressing would be the places where these people live. 2009 saw the appearance of a new term, "environmental refugees". The Carteret Islands off the coast of Papua New Guinea were some of the first victims of rising ocean levels. Around 2600 people were either evacuated and/or are waiting to be evacuated. In an article by Nora Gamolo, it is stressed that the hardest hit areas will be the island nations of Southeast Asia. She estimates that globally 8 to 52 million people will be affected by rising ocean levels due to pollution, possibly destroying several biodiversity hot spots. On the topic of biodiversity, trash is washing up on beaches from polluted oceans at record rates affecting the natural environment of these beaches.

Some generic info about the scope of how the issues is seen by some of the research that NASA has published since the last time the country debated ocean policy. Many have already heard the statistic about the ten warmest years the United States has seen have all fallen in the last twelve years. The connection of this statistic will be connected to ocean harms later in this paper. NASA also found that both the Antarctic and Arctic are losing about 36 cubic miles of ice sheet every year. This can be seen in rising ocean levels across the globe. In the past ten years the rate of sea level rise is already double of the last century and is also related to the rising levels of ocean heat content. All are statistics that affect the growth of the magnitude of the problem since being debated ten years ago.

Additionally the economics of the ocean give the topic an everlasting sense of timeliness. It is estimated that upwards of \$600 billion dollars of exports leave through ports on the U.S. coastline. The impact of the economy is twofold. First, ships leave so much pollution in their wake. Second, ships are actually in some cases navigating away from some of the large trash patches that are plaguing the world's oceans.

In regards to exploration, oil companies are still looking to harvest oil and natural gas in the world's oceans. The National Ocean Economics Program estimated that 32% of domestic oil production came from ocean drilling in 2010. It also estimated that 19% of domestic natural gas

production came from offshore drilling. With consistently rising gas prices combined with the U.S. striving for oil independence from the Middle East, economic issues regarding oil production from offshore drilling make this a possible affirmative case.

Scope and Quality

The scope of the debate in this case will ultimately depend on the topic chosen. Although it might seem like ocean policy in some instances would be consistent across region, the literature on ocean policy presents a myriad of issues across many regions. Therefore, a number of resolutions with variants of agent of action and geographic spheres have been presented.

In resolutions 1 and 2, a stray from the norm is presented in regards to the agent of action. Although it might be uncomfortable, to move past the federal government as an agent of action, there are some benefits to moving in this direction. The educational benefits of arguing UNEP as an agent of action are numerous. Seasoned debaters will be forced to learn the workings of an international agency. Additionally, the United Nations Environment Programme was legitimized this past December. UNEP's budget was increased and it was declared the world's leading environmental authority. These were declared in a resolution passed by the General Assembly. Archim Steiner, the agency's Executive Director also declared, "The resolution reaffirms UNEP's role as the UN's authority on the environment, and provides the mandate to enhance our ongoing work on bringing the latest science to policy-makers, directly supporting national and regional environmental efforts, improving access to technology, and other key areas." Finally, the agency has its headquarters in Africa which shows some faith in a burgeoning continent.

In subsequent resolutions, a more normalized approach is taken to the resolutions. Each coastal region that the U.S. borders has unique problems that it deals with.

Gulf of Mexico – Many will argue if this should even be included in the resolution as it is not labeled an ocean. Most of the literature suggests that the Gulf of Mexico doubles as an ocean basin because of the scope and size. It is included in this report because of the large amount of issues the Gulf has faced over the past ten years. Most young debaters will have a working knowledge of the BP oil spill from a few years ago. This doubles as an issue that can fall into the cleanup and exploration categories. Offshore oil drilling doesn't seem to be slowing down as the U.S. tries to stave off Middle East oil. On the other side of the coin, many people are still cleaning up the massive area that the BP oil spill affected. Additionally, the Mississippi River has long been a funnel of runoff pesticides and other harmful chemicals from America's breadbasket. In a 2010 article by the New York Times, it is suggested by mapping experts that the Gulf floor is littered with old bombs and chemical weapons dumped there in the middle of the last century. Although the threat appears to be low, as oil companies continue to look for drilling sites the threat becomes more real. Another interesting possibility for exploration is the idea of thermal cooling stations. Large platforms pump cold water to the warm surface level water. This in turn creates energy and has been looked at as an option for lessening the intensity of hurricanes. Much more research is needed to perfect this exploratory option.

Atlantic Ocean – Many of the issues that are at the forefront of the Atlantic Ocean deal with overfishing and the impact on endangered species. Manatees, turtles and whales all are hurt by

the impact of fishing and the drift nets that are sometimes left behind. Another significant impact of pollution is the water quality itself. Infected and polluted waters are slowing hurting the businesses of mid-Atlantic coastal communities. The National Resources Defense Council also expounds upon some of the discoveries in the Atlantic. A new series of underground caverns has been discovered that stretches from the Cape Cod region to just north of Bermuda. Researchers and scientists are anxiously awaiting new species discovery and other abnormalities the area holds.

Pacific Ocean – The pollution problem in the Pacific is probably worse in some ways than in any other water region. In an article from The Week from May of last year, it is stated that about one in ten fish have bits of plastic in their stomachs. Many of these fish are of varieties that are taken to seafood markets across the Pacific coast. Although some of this plastic comes from human consumption, a large amount of this pollution comes from the Pacific trash patch. Although this trash patch existed before the devastating tsunami that hit Japan over two years ago, the magnitude of trash washed away to sea increased exponentially after this devastating event. The article further explains some of the hidden issues associated with the trash patch. Researchers feel that the trash patch is providing ample areas for species such as sea skaters and water striders to lay eggs. These species feed on plankton and fish larvae which is critical to the feeding habits of other species. This disrupts the oceanic feeding cycle and has many fishermen worried. Another issue associated with the trash in the Pacific is the high levels of chemicals that the trash is able to absorb. The larger the piece of trash the higher the capacity for absorption is. Many seabirds and turtles mistake the plastic trash for prey. When eaten, the high toxicity levels of the plastic spell doom for the animal. Researchers also fear rising acidity levels in the ocean as a whole. High acidity levels are especially worrisome for the shellfish industry. The acidity in the ocean prevents the development of the hard shells of the species. This prevents full development and leaves the shellfish unable to be harvested. This poses an enormous economic impact for the Pacific Northwest. Exploration issues in the Pacific are very similar to issues presented with the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. One key difference is the possibility for disposal of nuclear waste. Many nations have looked into the possibility of burying flechettes in the deep Pacific Ocean floor.

Indian Ocean – Originally, I felt that the Indian Ocean should be off limits when discussing a topic on oceans. However, after much research, the Indian Ocean is probably the biggest hotbed of economic, political and defense issues for the United States. The United States is seeking to build relations with both India and China. However, the two are at odds with the management of the Indian Ocean region. Many analysts feel that the United States is at odds with China about how best to develop the region. The United States is worried about state-based threats from nations such as China and Iran. The delicate relations with these countries affect an infinite amount of trade, particularly with the export of petroleum. The United States also has the uneasy task of balancing large defense cuts with its priorities in continuing President Obama's Asian 'pivot'. Many feel that increased staging at Diego Garcia will be necessary. Diego Garcia also is vital as one of five places where the United States global positioning system has its antennae. The Indian Ocean is also ripe with mineral resources. Some experts argue that over 75% of the world's gold is being mined in the waters of the Indian Ocean. BP has already starting drilling for oil in the waters of the East African coast. It estimates that this is the next great hotbed for oil and natural gas exploration. Additionally, the United States is also concerned about the increase

in human smuggling and drug trafficking that is occurring in the Indian Ocean region. The list of issues presented with the Indian Ocean in this section is a very abbreviated version, but the wealth of topic information and ideas on this potential area is vast.

Harms Areas

The scope of harms areas will ultimately be dependent on the resolution chosen but the realm of possibilities is large. This list is an abbreviated list.

Oil Dependence – Offshore oil drilling is not a venture that seems to be going away. In fact most oil companies plan on expanding their offshore ventures especially in the Gulf of Mexico. With expanded opportunities for drilling and better safety measures, novice teams might find this to be a suitable option. The Center for American Progress details that the United States imports about 1.5 billion barrels of oil a year from ‘dangerous or unstable’ nations. This can potentially increase the risk of attack from insurgents. The money made from these imports help fuel these unstable governments. Parallels can be made to Hussein’s Iraq. Additionally, the rise in oil imports widens the trade deficit leading to a myriad of economic issues.

Seafood Industry – With higher levels of pollution, some fishermen are finding it harder to find a suitable haul. In the past ten years, the crab population around the coasts of the United States has declined by half. Many fish are now being found with bits of plastic in their bellies. Higher levels of toxicity are also making some seafood unusable for market. Fish are capable of concentrating 9 times the toxic levels of some chemicals that are being dumped into the ocean. Research has shown that the chemicals that are being found in these fish can lead to increased risks of developing diseases such as cancer. Larger issues of hunger can also be linked to this harms area since the global demand for seafood consumption has gone up drastically in the past decade. A report done by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation has shown that improving sewage plants and storm runoff sites can help the populations of fish and shellfish as well. A new phenomenon that is occurring is the runoff from storms causing entire communities of shellfish to be drowned under a floor of mud.

Environmental Refugees – With links to global warming, some aff teams can argue that more and more people are being displaced by rising ocean levels. This is said to be linked to the rising pollution levels of industrialized countries. It is also estimated that up to 75% of our population will be coastally located within the next 20 years. The significance of this topic shows the pressing debate that is needed. The term ‘environmental refugee’ is not even recognized by the international community proving its significance. Environmental refugees are also being displaced because their way of life is being threatened. The amount of rice fields that are being flooded by salt water in Bangladesh is on the rise and therefore destroying many farmers’ way of life.

Nuclear Waste – It is harder and harder to find a way to appropriately dispose of nuclear waste. Since the amount of ocean that has been explored is minimal, some countries are looking at burying flechettes as a viable option.

Endangered Species – This issue is particularly present in the Atlantic. Manatees, turtles and whales are all being affected by the polluted waters of the Atlantic and overfishing of certain areas. Another link could be the disastrous effects that pollution has had on coral reefs.

Ocean Acidification – This harm area has also been linked to the loss of coral reefs. In the past ten years the amount of bleaching events in the world's oceans has quintupled. This has impacts on the fishing industry as coral reefs are hotbeds of aquatic life. It also hurts the tourism industry as it is estimated that \$1 billion is spent annually on reef tourism. More pressing is the fact that it affects the development of shells on many varieties of shellfish. Shellfish don't have the capacity to grow a strong shell and therefore are either dying or are unable to be sold.

Invasive Species – As mentioned earlier, sea skaters and water striders are being aided by trash patches. The higher number of bugs decreases the amount of plankton and fish larvae available as a food source for other ocean wildlife.

Roadblocks in Disease Research – Although there is a shaky link here, advanced teams might go for the angle of new species being researched for developments in disease. Several advancements and developments in disease research have come from discoveries of ocean wildlife.

State-Based Threats – Although unique to the eighth resolution, state-based threats from China and Iran have the potential to collapse the U.S. economy and energy sectors. The shipping lanes in the eastern Indian Ocean are largely managed by Chinese firms. Many also are claiming that China is trying to cut off the United States with its "string of pearls" strategy. Some of the oil shipping lanes in the Middle East into the Indian Ocean are largely controlled by Iran. Many are already used to the threats that Iran has made in regards to shutting down the Strait of Hormuz.

Defense Cuts – Most defense cuts from the Obama administration focus on land troops in the Middle East and South Asia. However, with the desire to continue the Asian 'pivot' more staging is going to have to happen with naval operations in the Indian Ocean. Many experts do not know how this will look. The importance of outposts such as Diego Garcia become vitally important but as of now there is a lack of infrastructure to support the goals of an Asian 'pivot'.

Human Smuggling and Drug Trafficking – The Indian Ocean region has now become one of the main channels for both human and drug trafficking. This is due to the large amount of both Muslim insurgents who protect passage for perpetrators and the large amount of Indian pirates who are willing to engage in the practice.

Negative Ground

While the main disadvantages from plans might seem like they will all be drawn from economic challenges, I hope to show that there is the potential for so much more in the negative sphere. Don't get me wrong, a large proportion of negative ground will be linked to economic challenges but the innovation of debaters in several regions has never ceased to amaze me.

Oil – Oil is a crucial issue that is linked to many possible affirmatives. Oil issues will also more than likely be debated by many novice debaters. There is an abundance of negative ground when

it comes to oil exploration. First, the Center for American Progress contends that burning oil will exacerbate the problems of global warming. More advanced teams can take this generic claim and link it to the displacement of people due to the rise in natural disasters. The United States is also losing the potential to invest in clean energy which could potentially produce upwards of 1.7 million jobs according to the same article from the Center for American Progress. One issue that is very unique to the debate from ten years ago is the fact that the Pentagon has now added climate change to its list of things classified as security threats. Climate change was added to the list in 2010.

Fishing Industry – As for the claims about the destruction of the fishing industry one of the main routes a negative team could go is overfishing. Overfishing would be spurred due to the cleanup of estuaries. Overfishing destroys the balance of ecosystems often times more than the pollution itself. Many companies would be willing to send fishing vessels further out if there was clear passage. This could result in the destruction of species of fish that are vital to the ocean. If there was no trash patch, there is nothing preventing companies from overfishing. This type of fishing has already led to the endangerment of fish such as orange roughy, Chilean sea bass and the bluefin tuna. Another route that could be taken is to run an argument against cleanup to just establish more coastal commercial oyster farms. Oysters are a filter feeder and can eliminate many of the toxins that reside in the ocean now.

Environmental Refugees – This topic area is tough since it is very new. One strategy could be that the refugees stress governments to enact policies that might stretch its immigration law. This can be seen with President Obama granting refuge for Haitians that were displaced by the devastating hurricane that hit the island nation. Advanced teams might also argue that migration experts would say that this is not an issue that merits solvency. Throughout history there have been many people that have been displaced by natural disasters. Affirmatives would then have to focus on the fact that this is not ‘natural’. Finally, negatives can run a kritik on the term refugee saying that this type of refugee doesn’t fit the standard created by the 1951 UN convention.

Ocean Acidification – First, negative teams can argue that this is not a U.S. problem. The main challenges of ocean acidification are being faced by nations such as Indonesia and the Philippines. Negative teams can also go after the fact that the comparisons on ocean acidification are all based on pre-Industrial levels of ocean pH. The problem is that there was no one determining the pH of ocean water during pre-Industrial times so there is no way to get an accurate measure of change. Teams can also argue that carbon dioxide levels were much higher in the Cambrian era 600 million years ago but species still found a way to survive.

Indian Ocean – Although it might come across as bias to this topic, there is a significant amount of negative ground on this topic. First, on affirmatives that go after mining and oil exploration, teams can argue about the myriad of political issues that go with territorial rights in international waters. This can be true with any economic based harms case. Next, India and China are at odds about the future of development in the Indian Ocean. US interests more closely align with India, but partnering with India might further ignite contention and distrust with China. In fact, China has now started to strategically partner with Pakistan a nation that has also had its political ups and downs with the United States. Whichever way the affirmative goes, Chinese disadvantages will come into play. Another issue that might surface is friction with Russia. One of the main

reasons the United States started to increase its presence in the Indian Ocean was because of the Cold War and US attempts to monitor the Soviet Union. Increased development in the Indian Ocean might lead to a strain in relations due to suspicion of US objectives. Terrorism and piracy could also be potential negative ground. The largest beds of al-Qaeda terror cells are now thought to be in Indonesia and Malaysia, two countries that have significant ties to the Indian Ocean region. An increase in development could elevate the risk of terrorism in the region. Piracy is also on the rise. More sea traffic in the region means more fodder for pirates. This was apparent when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam took over an Indonesian vessel and prevented its goods from going to port. Although this Sri Lankan group is not typically known for piracy, it is an example of what could happen with increased traffic and trade goods in the region. Finally, experienced teams might be able to get away with a colonialism kritik. Asian peoples in the area might see an increased US presence as a return to the days of colonialism. Even though America wasn't the largest player of colonialism in this area, our connection to the United Kingdom might be worrisome to Indians, Chinese and other Middle Eastern nations.

Topicality – I also feel that extratopicality might be a negative strategy with many of these topics. Any plan that provides a benefit outside the specified waters of the region might be hit with an extratopicality argument.

Definitions

United Nations Environment Programme

“an international organization established in 1972 to catalyse and coordinate activities to increase scientific understanding of environmental change and develop environmental management tools”. OECD glossary of statistical terms

Should

“used to indicate obligation, duty, or correctness, typically when criticizing someone’s actions”. Oxford Online Dictionary

“used to express obligation or duty”. American Heritage Online Dictionary

Pass

“to become approved by a legislature or body empowered to sanction or reject”. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

Policy

“The general principles by which a government is guided in its management of public affairs, or the legislature in its measures.” Black’s Law Dictionary

Resolution

“a formal expression of opinion, will, or intent voted by an official body or assembled group” – Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

Urge

“to present, advocate, or demand earnestly or pressing” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

UN Member Nations

“states which are members of an the organization of the UN”. Investorwords.com

World

“the earth with its inhabitants and all things upon it”. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

Ocean

“the whole body of salt water that covers nearly three fourths of the surface of the earth”.

“any of the large bodies of water (as the Atlantic Ocean) into which the great ocean is divided.” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

Promote

“to contribute to the growth or prosperity of”. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

“to contribute to the progress or growth of; further”. American Heritage Online Dictionary

Aid

“to give assistance”. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

Substantially

the amount of definitions is literally endless and most are highly debatable

Increase

“become or make greater in size, amount, intensity, or degree”. Oxford Online Dictionary

United States federal government

“The United States Federal Government is established by the U.S. Constitution. The Federal Government shares sovereignty over the United States with the individual governments of the States of U.S. The Federal government has three branches: i) the legislature, which is the U.S. Congress, ii) Executive, comprised of the President and Vice-president of the U.S. and iii) Judiciary”. US Legal.com Definitions

Exploration

“an act or instance of exploring or investigating; examination”.

“the investigation of unknown regions”. Dictionary.com

Gulf of Mexico

Most sources define the Gulf as an arm of the Atlantic to the south of the United States and to the east of Mexico.

Atlantic Ocean

“The world’s second-largest ocean, divided into the North Atlantic and the South Atlantic. It extends from the Arctic in the north to the Antarctic in the south between the eastern Americas and western Europe and Africa.” – FreeDictionary.com

Pacific Ocean

“The largest of the world’s oceans, divided into the North Pacific Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean. It extends from the western Americas to eastern Asia and Australia.” – FreeDictionary.com

Indian Ocean

“A body of water extending from southern Asia to Antarctica and from eastern Africa to southeast Australia.” – FreeDictionary.com

Development

“A significant event, occurrence, or change.” – FreeDictionary.com

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