

AAAS Survey Report

In November 2003, AAAS commissioned a survey of American adults to understand their attitudes and opinions of marine issues. Ten survey questions (see Appendix A) were answered by 2,400 adults ages 18 and older. Survey respondents were members of Synovate's consumer mail panel. Data were weighted to match U.S. Census population proportions. The following analyses examine differences by gender, region, age, education, and marital status. Significant differences between groups are bolded in the following tables.

Perceived Threat and Personal Influence

Respondents were given two statements concerning the ocean's ability to sustain itself given man-made stresses and were asked to select which one was closer to their personal view. Respondents were then asked to gauge how much influence they felt their personal actions have on the health of the oceans and coastal areas.

- Almost eight out of ten adults indicated they feel that man-made stresses are endangering coastal regions and oceans and this may lead to long-term damage and serious problems (see Table 1). Participants were much less likely to believe the oceans are so vast and healthy they can withstand man-made stresses (21%).
- Only three out of ten adults (31%) thought their personal actions have a lot of influence on the health of oceans and coastal regions.
- No significant differences in perceived threat or personal influence were noted by gender.
- Adults living in the Northeast region of the country were significantly more likely than adults in other parts of the country to believe man-made stresses are leading to long-term damage and serious problems.
- Adults in the West and South central regions of the country were more likely than people from the Northeast or North central regions to believe their personal actions have a lot of influence on the health of oceans and coastal regions.

Table 1. Perceived threat and personal influence by gender and region

	TOTAL	GENDER		REGION				
		Male	Female	Northeast	North central	South Atlantic	South central	West
(Sample size)	2400	1200	1200	504	629	398	382	487
Which statement is closer to your view?								
The oceans and coastal regions overall are so vast and healthy that they can continue to absorb pollution and other kinds of man-made stresses for the foreseeable future	20.9%	20.4%	21.4%	15.9%	20.7%	20.6%	24.1%	23.4%
Man-made stresses are endangering coastal regions and the ocean's ability to sustain itself may well be leading to long-term damage and serious problems	79.1%	79.6%	78.6%	84.1%	79.3%	79.4%	75.9%	76.6%
Personal actions influence the health of the oceans and coastal areas (% a lot of influence)	31.1%	29.6%	32.7%	29.4%	27.1%	30.4%	33.7%	35.5%

- No significant differences in perceived threat or personal influence were noted by age or marital status (see Table 2).
- Increased education was associated with the perception that ocean sustainability is a problem. Adults with a higher education (college degree or higher) were more likely than those with a high school degree or less to believe man-made stresses are endangering oceans and coastal regions (84% vs. 74%).

Table 2. Perceived threat and personal influence by age, education, and marital status

	TOTAL	AGE			EDUCATION			MARRIED	
		18-34	35-54	55+	HS or less	Some college	College+	Not married	Married
(Sample size)	2400	597	947	856	665	781	710	678	1694
Which statement is closer to your view?									
The oceans and coastal regions overall are so vast and healthy that they can continue to absorb pollution and other kinds of man-made stresses for the foreseeable future	20.9%	19.7%	21.0%	22.1%	26.3%	21.1%	15.6%	21.7%	20.7%
Man-made stresses are endangering coastal regions and the ocean's ability to sustain itself may well be leading to long-term damage and serious problems	79.1%	80.3%	79.0%	77.9%	73.7%	78.9%	84.4%	78.3%	79.3%
Personal actions influence the health of the oceans and coastal areas (% a lot of influence)	31.1%	31.3%	32.6%	29.0%	32.8%	31.3%	29.9%	32.7%	30.2%

Willingness To Take Action

Respondents were asked how willing they would be to take a variety of actions if they knew it would help protect the health and resources of our oceans, bays, and coastal areas.

- Six out of ten adults said they would be willing to eat less of certain kinds of fish to help protect resources (see Table 3). More than half (56%) were also willing to support the use of public funds for new research and technologies to reduce pollution. Respondents were slightly less likely to support government regulation restricting the use of the seashore (47%) or to support local efforts to reduce business and economic development of coastal areas (46%).
- Women were more likely than men to be willing to eat less of certain kinds of fish if it would help protect resources (62% vs. 57%).
- People living in the West were more likely than other groups to say they would be willing to eat less fish, and they would support government regulation restricting the use of the seashore. People living in the North central region of the country were less likely than other groups to support local efforts to reduce business and economic development, or to support the use of public money for new research to reduce pollution.
- Within each region, the most supported action was eating less fish except for the Northeast where people were most likely to say they would be willing to support the use of public funds for new research and technologies to reduce pollution.

Table 3. Willingness to take action by gender and region

	TOTAL	GENDER		REGION				
		Male	Female	Northeast	North central	South Atlantic	South central	West
How willing would you be to do each of the following if you knew it would help protect the health and resources of our oceans, bays and coastal areas? (% willing)								
Eat less of certain kinds of fish	59.7%	57.1%	62.3%	58.6%	57.1%	56.6%	61.1%	65.1%
Support government regulation restricting the use of the seashore	46.5%	45.9%	47.2%	44.6%	40.7%	49.4%	48.9%	50.0%
Support local efforts to reduce business and economic development of coastal areas	45.7%	44.9%	46.5%	46.7%	38.6%	51.5%	46.2%	47.2%
Support the use of public money for new research and technologies to reduce pollution	55.7%	55.8%	55.6%	61.6%	48.9%	55.7%	54.3%	58.8%

- No differences in willingness to take action were noted by age (see Table 4).
- Adults with a college education were more likely than adults with a high school degree or lower to say they would be willing to eat less fish, support local efforts to reduce

development, and support the use of public funds for research and technologies to reduce pollution.

- Married adults were less likely than their unmarried peers to support government regulation of seashore use or local efforts to reduce development.

Table 4. Willingness to take action by age, education, and marital status

	TOTAL	AGE			EDUCATION			MARRIED	
		18-34	35-54	55+	HS or less	Some college	College+	Not married	Married
How willing would you be to do each of the following if you knew it would help protect the health and resources of our oceans, bays and coastal areas? (% willing)									
Eat less of certain kinds of fish	59.7%	60.8%	60.7%	57.2%	56.0%	59.1%	66.0%	57.5%	60.7%
Support government regulation restricting the use of the seashore	46.5%	48.2%	47.2%	43.9%	44.9%	44.2%	48.5%	50.6%	44.7%
Support local efforts to reduce business and economic development of coastal areas	45.7%	48.2%	46.1%	42.6%	39.4%	45.9%	49.0%	48.5%	44.1%
Support the use of public money for new research and technologies to reduce pollution	55.7%	57.5%	55.1%	54.6%	52.4%	52.2%	62.9%	57.2%	54.6%

International Support

Respondents were given two statements about whether nations should act interdependently or independently to protect the oceans’ resources and were asked to select which one was closer to their personal view.

- Respondents were much more likely to believe the oceans’ resources should be protected in a global way through international agreements than they were to believe oceans are best protected when countries take responsibility for their own coasts and do not interfere with each other (71% vs. 29%; see Table 5).
- No differences in international support were noted by gender.
- People living in the West and Northeast were more likely than those living in the central and South Atlantic regions to believe that protecting the oceans’ resources is best done in a global way, such as through international agreements about fishing and oil-drilling practices.

Table 5. International support by gender and region

	TOTAL	GENDER		REGION				
		Male	Female	Northeast	North central	South Atlantic	South central	West
Which statement is closer to your view?								
Protecting the oceans' resources is best done in a global way, such as through international agreements about fishing and oil-drilling practices	71.5%	71.1%	71.9%	73.7%	68.4%	70.2%	69.0%	75.8%
Oceans are best protected when countries take responsibility for their own coasts and do not interfere with the practices of other countries	28.5%	28.9%	28.1%	26.3%	31.6%	29.8%	31.0%	24.2%

- No differences in international support were found by age or marital status (see Table 6).
- Adults with a college education were significantly more likely than those with less education to believe that protecting the oceans' resources is best done in a global way.

Table 6. International support by age, education, and marital status

	TOTAL	AGE			EDUCATION			MARRIED	
		18-34	35-54	55+	HS or less	Some college	College+	Not married	Married
Which statement is closer to your view?									
Protecting the oceans resources is best done in a global way, such as through international agreements about fishing and oil-drilling practices	71.5%	69.6%	72.4%	72.4%	65.6%	69.7%	80.5%	70.5%	72.0%
Oceans are best protected when countries take responsibility for their own coasts and do not interfere with the practices of other countries	28.5%	30.4%	27.6%	27.6%	34.4%	30.3%	19.5%	29.5%	28.0%

Interest In Science

Respondents were asked how interested they are in knowing more about the impact science issues have on their lives, whether they would know where to turn to for reliable information about science issues, and whether or not they trust scientists to put society's interest above their personal goals.

- Overall, 38% of respondents said they were interested in knowing more about the impact science issues have on their lives, and another 28% were somewhat interested (see Table 7). More than a third (39%) indicated they would not know where to turn for reliable information on science issues. Only 34% said they trust scientists to put society's interest above their personal goals.

- Men were more likely than women to say they trust scientists to put society’s interest above their personal goals (36% vs. 32%).
- People in the South central (39%) and Northeast (37%) regions were more likely than other adults, especially those in the North central region, to trust scientists.

Table 7. Interest in science by gender and region

	TOTAL	GENDER		REGION				
		Male	Female	Northeast	North central	South Atlantic	South central	West
How interested are you in knowing more about the impact science issues have on your life?								
Not interested	34.6%	35.0%	34.2%	29.7%	37.4%	31.6%	34.8%	38.1%
Somewhat interested	27.8%	28.9%	26.7%	29.3%	28.9%	30.1%	25.8%	24.8%
Interested	37.7%	36.2%	39.1%	41.0%	33.6%	38.3%	39.4%	37.1%
Would you know where to turn to for reliable information about these issues?								
Yes	61.5%	61.6%	61.3%	61.9%	58.8%	62.4%	60.9%	63.5%
No	38.5%	38.4%	38.7%	38.1%	41.2%	37.6%	39.1%	36.5%

Table 8. Interest in science by age, education, and marital status

		AGE			EDUCATION			MARRIED	
	TOTAL	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or less	Some college	College+	Not married	Married
How interested are you in knowing more about the impact science issues have on your life									
Not interested	34.6%	33.3%	33.9%	36.7%	38.6%	35.7%	31.2%	32.8%	35.5%
Somewhat interested	27.8%	28.9%	26.5%	28.4%	29.2%	26.7%	26.5%	26.0%	28.8%
Interested	37.7%	37.9%	39.6%	34.9%	32.3%	37.6%	42.3%	41.2%	35.7%
Would you know where to turn to for reliable information about these issues?									
Yes	61.5%	61.8%	63.7%	58.1%	48.7%	63.6%	72.0%	58.0%	62.5%
No	38.5%	38.2%	36.3%	41.9%	51.3%	36.4%	28.0%	42.0%	37.5%
I trust scientists to put society's interest above their personal goals (% agree)	34.2%	35.4%	31.6%	36.3%	32.9%	33.1%	34.6%	37.4%	32.9%

Appendix A. Survey Questions

Q1. Next I am going to read two statements. Please tell me which one is closer to your view on this topic. The first one says,

“The oceans and coastal regions overall are so vast and healthy that they can continue to absorb pollution and other kinds of man-made stresses for the foreseeable future.”

The second one says, “Man-made stresses are endangering coastal regions and the ocean’s ability to sustain itself and may well be leading to long-term damage and serious problems.”

Which statement is closer to your views, the first one or the second one?

Q2. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means “no influence” and 5 means “a lot of influence,” how much influence do you think your personal actions can have on promoting the health of the oceans and coastal areas?

Q3-6. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means “not at all willing” and 5 means “very willing,” how willing would you be to do each of the following if you knew it would help protect the health and resources of our oceans, bays and coastal areas?

Eat less of certain kinds of fish?

Support government regulation restricting the use of the seashore?

Support local efforts to reduce business and economic development of coastal areas?

Support the use of public money for new research and technologies to reduce pollution?

Q7. Again, I am going to read two statements. Please tell me which one is closer to your view on this topic.

The first one says, “Protecting the oceans’ resources is best done in a global way, such as through international agreements about fishing and oil-drilling practices.”

The second one says, “Oceans are best protected when countries take responsibility for their own coasts and do not interfere with the practices of other countries.”

Which statement is closer to your views, the first one or the second one?

- Q8. On a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 means “not at all interested” and 10 means “very interested,” how interested are you in knowing more about the impact science issues (like cloning, SARS, genetically modified food and ocean pollution) have on your life?
- Q9. If you wanted to learn more about these issues, would you know where to turn to for reliable information?
- Q10. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree,” how much do you disagree or agree with the following statement?

Generally speaking, I trust scientists to put society’s interest above their personal goals.