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Says man making seas "poisoned cesspools"

By STAN BENJAMIN

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Man is poisoning the sea, methodically polluting seven-tenths of the world and slaughtering four-fifths of all living things.

By regarding the ocean as an inexhaustible source of food on the one hand, and an insatiable sink for his wastes on the other, he is threatening to turn the seas into biological deserts.

Some scientists believe catastrophe is only a matter of time. "In a very few years we are going to have a most unpleasant awakening," says famed explorer Jacques Cousteau, who estimates on the basis of his own undersea observations that ocean life has decreased by 40 percent in the last 20 years.

Other scientists say the disappearance of the danger is only a delusion. "Most scientists in this field are very much concerned and we realize we don't know a damn thing about it," said Philip Butler, a leading marine biologist, in an interview.

There is no way to support or disprove Cousteau's estimate, he once measured the ocean life 30 years ago; no one is doing it now.

He scientist, said biologist George A. Woodward of Brookhaven National Laboratory, are just about the best to go across any real period. But my guess is that Cousteau is dead right.

How fast do man's persons spread? How much can damage do? How long can the

sea meet man's ever increasing demand for food?

These are questions for which scientists have no answers, but they do know the potestas are spreading. The damage has already begun:

—Forty-nine persons died in Japan from eating fish poisoned with industrial mercury.

—An epidemic of infectious hepatitis was started by Shell fish caught in sewage-contaminated New York waters.

—Fish-killing "red tide" organisms, believed to be triggered by pollutants, have sickened people through contact or ingestion.

—The buildup near industrialized areas of toxic substances is causing cancer-inducing agents such as DDT. "It has reached frightening proportions," according to B. W. Halseid, director of the World Life Research Institute.

—There is no longer any question that these materials are entering man's marine food resources. "We are holding an international conference on pollution last November.

Pollution is only part of the problem. To meet the demand for fresh fish, the fishermen are ranging farther and farther from his home waters, casting a wider net and still landing in smaller catches.

The worldwide catch of fish and shellfish, after tripling in the last 30 years, declined for the first time in 1969. Donald Whitaker, economic analyst for the National Marine Fisheries Service, said the catch increased again in 1970, but only

because fishermen went after new species.

"A great many fish have just about reached their limit," Whitaker said in an interview. "The lullback off our northeast coast have been overfished.

Countries that fish that area are now abiding by a quota, but they really should stop entirely for a couple of years. The lullback are in danger of becoming extinct. We're not sure there are enough left to reproduce themselves."

Other species also are endangered. "Televisual flounder off the northeast are right on the verge of being overfished," Whitaker said. "The countries have agreed on a quota. There is a quota on tuna in the southern tropical Pacific Ocean. I wouldn't be surprised if we have quotas soon on cod and perch. Lobster in the United States and Canada are just at their maximum catch."

"Previously," said Whitaker, "the fisheries were underutilized. Now we're on the verge of depleting the resource."

"Overfishing" tells only a fraction of the story. Contamination is starting to make the age-old-fished fish unfit to be eaten.

"The U.S. Food and Drug Administration closed shellfish beds in Buzzards Bay, Ca., and Port Lavaca Bay, Tex., last year because of mercury contamination from factories."

Contaminated food is taking its toll on the U.S. market, because of mercury. "We can ban imports," FDA regulator Richard Runk said. "We are not able to handle the domestic catch the same way. Seaside is almost impossible with the manpower we have now."

After hepatitis outbreak, the FDA banned shellfishing in the ocean off Raritan Bay, where the New York area dumps its sewage sludge, and off the Delaware Bay, Philadelphia's sewage dump.

The FDA did seize some Pacific Coast mackerel, dangerously high in DDT, but it let contaminated fish, fish livers and fish protein concentrate slip through its fingers.

Runk said "the product was gone by the time the analysis was completed."

"We can't take it off the market after it's sold because the product has lost its identity in the marketplace," he said. Fish oil, for example, ends up in various preparations.

The effects of overfishing were dramatically illustrated by the whaling industry, which long ago all but destroyed itself, along with the earth's largest mammals.

As for the problem of contamination, the dangers were clearly outlined in Japan when methyl mercury killed 40 persons and ruined the nervous systems of 100 more.

BUT CAN man ruin all the oceans of the earth?

Consider any body. "The oceans are dying, whole society adapts an entire policy."

"We do not wish to understand the danger."

Industrial chemicals, oil, raw sewage, pesticides and machinery's hot breath brought to earth by rainfall, already have killed or crippled the life of streams, rivers and lakes.

But the ocean? That's where the polluted river flows. The ocean, said Falsstead, is "the final compost of most of man's activities."

The estuaries, where river meets sea, are already heavily polluted. They are also the spawning grounds of much marine life.

Butler has reported evidence that DDT killed shrimp in Texas estuaries, blocked the reproduction of speckled trout off the Texas Coast, and may be reducing Dungeness crabs off California.

DDT, a chemical invented to kill insects on farmland, has been found in Arctic seals and Antarctic penguins.

Woodwell doubts that pollution could kill all ocean life. His fear is that it could wipe out the higher forms.

"I estimate," he said, "that the earth's biota (life forms) probably contain less than one-thirtieth of one year's world production of DDT, at the production level of the 1960s."

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reached the sea, are port by the National Academy of Sciences estimated this year. If production stopped completely, three times as much DDT might still be on its way.

U.S. chemical companies reportedly produce more than 100 million pounds of DDT per year. It is estimated to last in nature, anywhere from 10 to 30 years.

Other pesticides, such as diel-drin, endrin, heptachlor epoxide, and heptachlor epoxide, are similarly long-lasting. So are the industrial chemicals called PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) now found worldwide and ranked by some scientists as an ocean pollutant second only to DDT.

So similar are the two chemicals in fact, that the Food and Drug Administration, relatively less fish only for DDT, if a finds DDT, the agency figures an equal amount of PCB must be present.

Monoments Chemical Co., the only manufacturer of PCBs in the United States, refuses "for competitive reasons" to reveal how much is being produced.

Meanwhile, the poignancy of the sea continues.

The United States dumped 40 million tons of its wastes into the sea in 1968 including at least 10 million tons of polluted sludge.

Such sludge has killed almost every living thing on the ocean floor in a 30-square-mile area off New York.

Foreign merchants saw sewage and chemical discharges are killing the bottom of Tokyo Bay and gradually choking the life out of the Baltic Sea and perhaps the Mediterranean.

Scientists estimate that man is adding a half-million different substances to the sea. The latest to draw attention was reported last November after a Soviet-Norwegian research ship found "red-white" patches of dead plankton along 70 miles of the Atlantic.

The killer appeared to be a dumped batch of "colorized" aliphatic hydrocarbons, the wastes of plastic manufacturing. The research ship reported "strong indications that (this chemical) originates from industries on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean."

Flounder are the microscopic plants and animals at the very foundation of the ocean's food chain. They also produce more than 70 percent of the earth's oxygen.

Three Scottish scientists have reported that plankton samplings 20 feet deep over 22 years showed "a most dramatic decline . . . in the Atlantic as well as in the North Sea."

They don't know what that means, or even whether it means anything.

What man knows is that he is poisoning the sea and its living things.

What he does not know is what his poison does to it or them.

Or himself.