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Duller, More Lifeless Oceans? No Thanks

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One of the reasons I love oceans is that they're bursting with life. Crazy, sort of unbelievable life if you think about it: Sea horses, anemones, whales, lobster, limpets, sharks, the list goes on and on.

For anyone fascinated by the beautiful oddities of the universe hiding around every corner, oceans are an endless smorgasbord of delights.

That's why it was sad to see this new study saying that ocean acidification will make our oceans, well, less interesting. And, more troubling still, less alive.

The study by the University of California, Davis, found that ocean acidification will hurt not only individual species but the entire ecosystems where they live. The result? Homogenized ocean environments dominated by just a few plants and animals and devoid of a vast array of creatures who called these places homes for thousands of years.

Here's how Kristy Kroeker, a postdoctoral researcher at Bodega Marine Laboratory at UC Davis, put it:

"The background, low-grade stress caused by ocean acidification can cause a whole shift in the ecosystem so that everything is dominated by the same plants, which tend to be turf algae.



"In most ecosystems, there are lots of different colorful patches of plants and animals -- of algae, of sponges, of anemones. With ocean acidification, you lose that patchiness. We call it a loss of functional diversity; everything looks the same."

Ocean acidification is already having devastating effects. Corals are disappearing, shellfish are being wiped out and red tide algae are growing more toxic. Left unchecked it threatens to branch out throughout the underwater food web, eventually risking salmon, otters, whales and even people who rely on oceans for protein.

It's no surprise: The world's oceans absorb some 22 millions of carbon pollution every day from factories, power plants, cars and other human sources. The result is that oceans

have been 30 percent more acidic -- far more acidic than our oceans have experience in millions of years.

Yes, as an environmental attorney, I'm deeply concerned about what it's doing to our oceans and the long-term effects it's going to have on sea life. It's so bad, we've been urging the Environmental Protection Agency to step in immediately and being a national plan to address this undeniable crisis.

But, as simply a fan of the ocean, I'd hate to see it become the shell of the wonderful place it once was. I don't want duller, drabber seas -- I want them vibrant, crackling with life and full of surprises

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