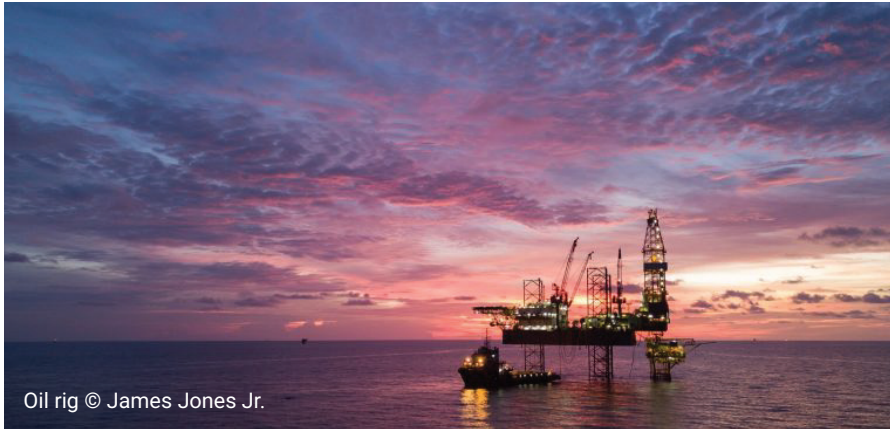




Habitat degradation



Oil rig © James Jones Jr.

Marine **habitat** degradation is when a marine **habitat's** quality declines because of **human activities**, making it harder for marine life to survive. Causes include **pollution**, **ocean warming** and **acidification** due to **climate change**, and **overfishing** and seafloor destruction. If degradation continues for too long, it can lead to full **habitat** loss. **Habitat** loss is when a marine area is completely destroyed or transformed and can no longer support the plants and animals that used to live there. This can happen through direct actions like **mining**, **dredging**, or building on the coast.

Easy to mitigate
Easy to quantify

Difficult to mitigate
Difficult to quantify



Did you know that...

- Only 13% of the world's oceans are untouched by humans [1].
- There is a worldwide initiative for governments to cover 30% of the ocean area with Marine Protect Areas (MPA) by 2030 [2]. The kind of protection in a MPA can vary from area to area.
- In 2022, 11% of the Northeast Atlantic was protected [3].
- With **climate change**, industrial and other **human activities** are expected to increase in the North [4].

FOLD



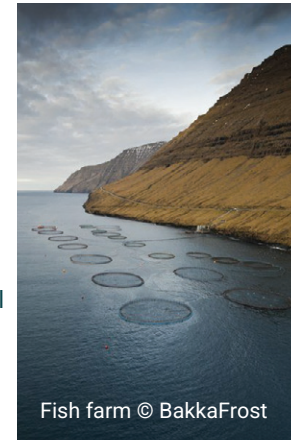
Habitat degradation



Overfishing © NOAA

Overfishing directly removes **prey** that marine mammals rely on, but it also disrupts the balance of marine **ecosystems**. When too many large **predatory fish** are caught, it can cause a chain reaction in the **food web**. For example, fewer **predators** might lead to an increase in seaweed-eating **species**, which can **overgraze** **kelp forests**, damaging these important **habitats**. Some fishing methods, like **bottom trawling**, also physically destroy the seafloor. This not only harms marine **biodiversity** but also makes it harder for marine mammals to find food and survive.

Aquaculture, including marine fish farming, is a growing industry and supports many coastal communities, but it also harms marine **habitats** in several ways. Fish farms take up space in the **environment**, blocking marine animals' movements. Marine mammals can get trapped and injured in the nets of fish farms (see **By-catch**). Waste, including leftover food, feces, and antibiotics, **pollutes** the surrounding water. This can lead to too many **nutrients** in the water, causing **algal blooms** that harm water quality and local **ecosystems**. Escaped farmed fish can also spread diseases, parasites or compete with wild fish, further changing **biodiversity** and affecting the **habitats** that marine mammals rely on for food and survival.



Fish farm © BakkaFrost



Discuss: Is **aquaculture** a sustainable solution to **overfishing**, or does it create more problems for marine **ecosystems** than it solves?

Read more about habitat degradation on the NAMMCO website:

