

**Wild  
Oceans**  
For the future of fishing

# The Horizon

## A sea of plastic

by Ken Hinman,  
Wild Oceans President

*I want to say one word to you. Just one word. Are you listening? Plastics. There's a great future in plastics. Think about it. Will you think about it?*

- The Graduate, 1967

About 30 years ago, while I was researching an article for Marlin magazine, "Plastics Plague Ocean Life," an angler fishing a Texas tournament landed a marlin with a plastic ring from a baby bottle around its bill. In the same tournament a fisherman hooked a red snapper sporting a plastic six-pack holder. As I discovered, these events were merely emblematic of an ocean being inundated with our synthetic waste. The danger plastics pose to marine life is much more insidious. Since that summer of 1988, it's only gotten worse.



Costa Sunglasses commissioned this 9-foot tall jumping marlin sculpture, made entirely of beach trash from the west coast, to start conversations about how anglers can become more involved in addressing the plastic problem. Artist Angela Pozzi from Washed Ashore designed and assembled the sculpture.

A report issued in 2016 by the World Economic Forum on "Rethinking the Future of Plastics"<sup>i</sup> estimates there are 150 million metric tons of plastic floating around in the ocean, with 8 million tons "leaking" into the sea each year, the majority of it discarded containers and packaging.

To put those numbers in perspective, the report puts the ratio of plastic to fish, by weight, at 1-to-5. By 2025, that ratio is projected to increase to 1-to-3. If current trends continue, "there may be more plastic than fish in the ocean, by weight, by 2050."

It's a big ocean, but with those odds, the chances of lethal and sub-lethal encounters are pretty high. In fact, many thousands of turtles, birds, marine mammals and large fish die through entanglement with or ingestion of indigestible plastics.

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## Our Mission

Wild Oceans was founded by anglers in 1973. Like the sportsmen before us who pioneered wildlife conservation on land, we are passionate protectors of fish and the wild world we share.

**Our mission is to keep the oceans wild to preserve fishing opportunities for the future.** To do this, we bring conservation-minded fishermen and pro-fishing environmentalists together to promote a broad, ecosystems approach to fisheries management that reflects our expanding circle of concern for all marine life and the future of fishing.

So much of what we love about the sea, about fish, about fishing, is in the wildness. But that wild world, and the future of fishing, now hangs in the balance. Everything we do, every decision we make, must be guided by a clear vision of the future we want for our oceans and of how the fishing public and responsible consumers will fit into that future.

## Chris Weld

One of the guys who started it all, who was there from the beginning, is gone.

Chris Weld, a co-founder of the National Coalition for Marine Conservation, now *Wild Oceans*, in 1973, died March 5<sup>th</sup> in Boston at the age of 84.

When Susie Weld, Chris' wife of 62 years, called to tell me Chris had passed, I felt a chill, like when a door is left open after someone larger than life, who has meant so much to this organization, to me personally, has left the building.

Chris was a great and influential advocate for the oceans and fishing for over five decades, and a pioneer in the marine conservation movement. Big game fishing offshore in New England in the 1960s brought him face-to-face with large-scale foreign fishing fleets and, recognizing the threat to America's fishery resources, he got involved in the campaign to establish the 200-mile wide Fishery Conservation Zone around the U.S. coastline. In that effort, he saw beyond "kicking the foreigners out" and worked for a new

conservation and management system to protect our fish from overfishing, foreign and domestic, and to give conservation-minded sport fishermen a seat at the table, i.e., the nascent regional fishery management councils. At around the same time, he began working for ocean-wide conservation of Atlantic bluefin tuna, warning of the sharp decline he witnessed first-hand.

This early advocacy as a conservationist led Chris to form, along with Frank Carlton, the NCMC, the first modern-era group dedicated solely to protecting ocean fish and their environment. When I came to work for Chris in 1978, I took my cue from his philosophy on marine conservation, which as I understood it from the beginning was this: always put the health of the resource first; don't let your ego get in the way of working with others, whether their interest is recreational, commercial or environmental; look for where and how you can make the most difference, as opposed to taking on the issue *du jour*; and in the end, what really matters is that you have an impact, not



whether everyone knows it.

Okay, forget that. I think everyone should know the impact Chris had, and appreciate that we've lost one of the last of his generation of American conservationists. In fact, based on the comments we've received from his friends and colleagues, there are many who already do.

A celebration of his life will take place in Essex, Massachusetts on May 13<sup>th</sup>.

– Ken Hinman, *President*

## For the Future of Fishing

Wild Oceans is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to keeping the oceans wild to preserve fishing opportunities for the future.

### Our Goals:

- preventing overfishing and restoring depleted fish populations to healthy levels
- promoting sustainable use policies that balance commercial, recreational and ecological values
- modifying or eliminating wasteful fishing practices
- improving our understanding of fish and their role in the marine environment
- preserving fish habitat and water quality

### Officers and Staff:

**Tim Choate**, Chairman

**Rick Weber**, Vice Chairman

**Ken Hinman**, President

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# A bill to bolster billfish protections

A rule to fully implement the Billfish Conservation Act of 2012 had the ignominious honor of being the only proposed rulemaking left unfinished by the Department of Commerce before the change of Administrations in January. For four years, the National Marine Fisheries Service struggled with the issue of whether or not Hawaiian-caught marlin, spearfish and sailfish exempted from the law's general ban on sales could be transported and sold elsewhere in the U.S. ("The Buck Stops... Where?", No. 151)

So a bipartisan group of senators stepped up and introduced legislation on February 15<sup>th</sup> to amend the Billfish Conservation Act, making it clear that the original intent of the BCA was to prohibit sales of any marlin, spearfish or sailfish in the mainland United States, regardless of who catches them or where. The bill, S. 396, was filed by Senators Bill Nelson (D-FL), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Joe Manchin (D-WV).

"On behalf of anglers and conservationists around the country, we are grateful to these four senators for stepping up and taking this action," said *Wild Oceans* president Ken Hinman and *IGFA* president Rob Kramer in a joint statement. The two organizations partnered to form the *Take Marlin Off the Menu* campaign in 2009, working together to pass the BCA and ever since to make sure it is fully implemented. "This simple bill, a 'technical amendment,' will ensure that billfish receive the full protections from commercial exploitation that the Billfish Conservation Act intended."

The landmark law has been in force since 2013, preventing an estimated



## Take **Marlin** Off the Menu

30,000 foreign-caught billfish a year from being sold in U.S. markets on the mainland, where U.S. commercial fishermen have been prohibited from selling blue, white and striped marlin, spearfish and sailfish for decades.

The Act, however, provides an exemption for the "traditional fisheries and markets" of Hawaii and Pacific island territories. The authors of the BCA said at the time that the exemption was meant for local sales and consumption only, but the law itself was silent on whether or not fish could be sold outside Hawaii, creating a loophole that needed to be closed.

The conservation benefit of keeping foreign imports out of U.S. markets is substantial, but it could be undermined by the free flow of Hawaiian-caught marlin within markets closed to everyone else, domestic and foreign.

The senate bill would not only close mainland markets to all Pacific billfish including those caught under the Hawaii exemption, it would strengthen enforcement of the billfish prohibition

nationwide while minimizing regulatory costs and making it immune to legal challenges based on unfair trade practices. ("Getting Past Customs", No. 146) ■



.....  
"By 2050 there may be  
more plastic in the ocean  
than fish."

Millions more suffer in one way or another. Lost fishing gear and traps made of synthetic materials "ghost fish" indefinitely. Marine animals consuming plastic flotsam, often mistaking it for food, choke to death, starve when it clogs their digestive tracts, or die from lacerations to the stomach wall.

In the North Pacific Central Gyre, a vast area where natural re-circulating currents concentrate life, making it a prime feeding ground for many migratory species, the concentration of plastic pollutants is particularly high. Testing randomly selected sites, researchers found over 300,000 pieces of plastic per square mile, with a mass six times the biomass of surface zooplankton. Zooplankton, filter-feeders at the base of the marine food web, are known to consume the tiny plastic particles that resemble fish eggs. Which means the plastics and the chemical additives they contain get passed up the food chain, accumulating in larger animals.

Similar studies show high concentra-

tions of plastics in the Sargasso Sea, in the Atlantic's Central Gyre. The Sargasso is prime habitat for ocean-going fish, turtles and other wildlife. The five Great Lakes, the largest freshwater system on earth, are reportedly burdened with 22 million pounds of plastic debris annually.<sup>ii</sup> It's a problem everywhere.

### What to Do

Plastic materials, whether in their original form or broken down into non-degradable micro-pellets, can accumulate in the ocean for centuries, underscoring the urgent need to halt the flow of plastics into the sea, which is primarily (80%) from land-based sources, by reducing supply and demand. So far, "anti-litter" laws, in place at the local, national and international levels, on land and at sea, have not been enough to stem the tide.

The previously cited report from the World Economic Forum, while it doesn't pretend to have all the answers, it does provide a global perspective on the problem and proposes "a vision and a roadmap as well as a vehicle" for solving it. The centerpiece is designing a "circular economy" for the plastics industry. That means creating a more cost-effective infrastructure for recovering, recycling and re-using

after-use plastic products. Key to closing the circle is providing a sufficient economic incentive to re-capture plastic packaging, cutting down on leakage into natural systems, in particular the ocean.

Realizing that demand for packaging and disposable products will continue as will leakage into the environment, industry, governments, researchers and NGOs must work together to explore and adopt renewably-sourced (i.e., biodegradable) and competitively-priced products.

Meanwhile, the burden is on the rest of us, the consumers, to become part of the solution. Not just when we're on or near the water, as anglers, pleasure boaters and beachgoers, but throughout our daily lives. That means reducing our demand for and use of disposable plastics and other synthetics and recycling whatever we do use. The future of the ocean and fishing is linked to the future of plastics. Think about it. ■

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### (Endnotes)

i The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the Future of Plastics. World Economic Forum. January 2016.

ii Our Plastic Oceans. Yves Engler. Counterpunch.org. February 3, 2017.

MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL

## OCEAN ACTION PLAN

[boem.gov/Ocean-Action-Plan/](http://boem.gov/Ocean-Action-Plan/)

Wild Oceans executive director Pam Lyons Gromen has been working with the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body on its **Regional Ocean Action Plan**, which includes among its Healthy Ocean Ecosystem actions to "Develop a regionally appropriate strategy for marine debris reduction." Here's the description in the final version of the plan, which was formally certified by the National Ocean Council in December 2016:

*Marine debris is a problem that threatens the health of Mid-Atlantic ocean ecosystems, and its resolution requires collaboration across levels of government and with the public and partners. The purpose of this action is to build on efforts of NOAA's Marine Debris Program, EPA's Trash-free Waters Program, and other existing programs and partnerships in the region to develop regionally appropriate and feasible marine debris reduction strategies that address key issues such as: debris from storms, derelict fishing gear, plastic food containers, microplastics, plastic bottles and bags, balloons, and cigarette butts. Strategies may include source reduction, coordinated cleanups, regionally applicable public outreach, education, and social marketing campaigns aimed at behavior change.*



## TWO WAYS TO HELP SCIENTISTS STUDY PACIFIC TUNA

# Got Tuna?

by Theresa Labriola,  
West Coast Fisheries Project Director

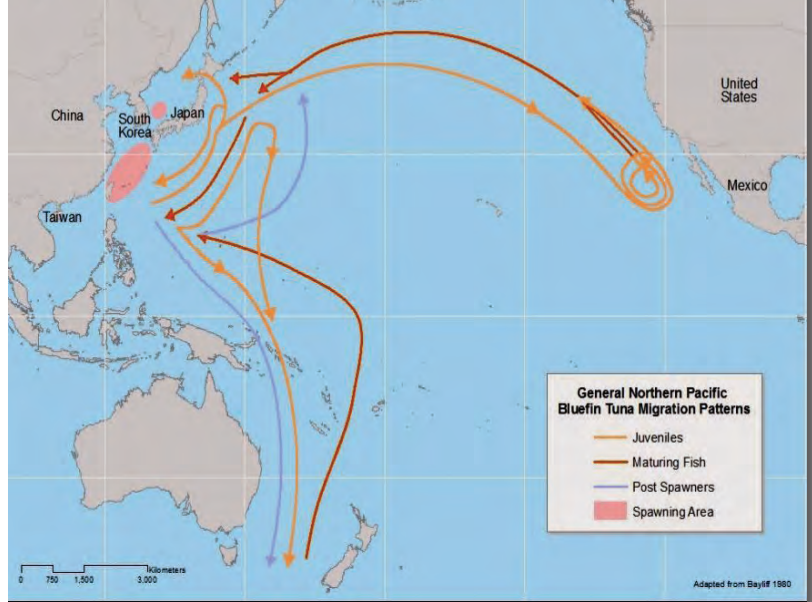
Anglers can help NOAA's Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC or Center) with their research of Pacific Bluefin Tuna and Pacific Albacore. Here's how.

In recent years, Pacific bluefin tuna bigger than 150 pounds have schooled off of California. This year, it looks like history may repeat itself, and scientists are asking anglers for help to collect gonads (reproductive parts), stomachs, and otoliths from these large bluefin caught off the California coast.

Scientists are examining these bluefin to see if they are mature and determine if they are spawning in the eastern Pacific. As far as we know, Pacific bluefin tuna only spawn in two regions in the western Pacific, near Japan. After hatching, a portion of the young bluefin migrate to the eastern Pacific Ocean to forage and grow. These bluefin usually return to the western Pacific Ocean as they approach sexual maturity at around 3-6 years old or 4-6 feet in length. However, in recent years fish that are potentially old enough to be mature have remained in the eastern Pacific for longer than usual, prompting new research and questions. While gonads collected so far have not exhibited developed ovaries or any evidence of spawning, the Center needs more samples to be conclusive.

If you would like to share your bluefin tuna carcasses, please keep samples on ice to preserve freshness and contact the Center as soon as possible to arrange for timely pickup. Any and all samples you provide will improve the quality of science. To participate, contact Owyn Snodgrass at the NOAA SWFSC in La Jolla, CA at [owyn.snodgrass@noaa.gov](mailto:owyn.snodgrass@noaa.gov).

If you head out on a trip targeting Pacific albacore tuna, keep an eye out for electronic, archival tags. NMFS tagged and released albacore in the North Pacific Ocean. These tags enable more detailed investigations into albacore behavior and habitat use, and can track individual fish vertically and horizontally throughout their range to help better understand their movement and migration along the Pacific Coast. Tagged fish can be identi-



fied by the presence of a green dart tag in the back of the fish near the second dorsal fin and a plastic coated stalk protruding from the rear portion of the belly. A reward of \$500 will be paid for the return of a tagged fish with the archival tag in place along with the date, latitude and longitude of where the tagged fish was caught and the gear used to catch the fish.

The reward can be obtained by returning the tagged fish and capture information to NMFS SWFSC in La Jolla, CA by contacting [John.Childers@noaa.gov](mailto:John.Childers@noaa.gov). ■



## Theresa honored for her work to conserve bluefin

On February 26<sup>th</sup>, Wild Oceans West Coast Fisheries Project Director Theresa Labriola received the Bill Poole Memorial Award, awarded annually by the Los Angeles Rod and Reel Club (LARRC) to a non-member who has made the greatest impact for the advancement of sport fishing. The Club recognized Theresa's work advocating for more precautionary management of Pacific bluefin tuna. **Congratulations, Theresa!** Theresa is pictured here with Donald Goldsobel (current President LARRC) and John Ballotti (former President LARRC).

THE 75% SOLUTION INCLUDED IN MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

# The people's choice for menhaden

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board met in Alexandria, Virginia to review public comment on an array of options for changing the way we manage what is perhaps the most important forage fish on the east coast, and to decide which options will go forward as part of Draft Amendment 3 later this year.

According to the record of public hearing testimony, written comments and signed petitions, the overwhelming choice of the over 25,000 citizens who weighed in on how best to protect the ecological role of menhaden – chiefly as prey for a plethora of predators, from striped bass and bluefin tuna to ospreys and whales – was Option D: Existing Guidelines for Forage Species. In fact, it was preferred by over 99 percent of all responders, as statistically close to unanimous as you can get.

Option D recommends using existing science-based guidelines for forage fish, such as fishing at a level that maintains 75 percent of the un-fished population. This rule-of-thumb target ecological reference point – combined with a minimum threshold of 40 percent, at which the fishery would close – could be implemented in 2018, while work continues on developing complex food web models to produce menhaden-specific ERPs, which are unlikely to be operational before 2022, if then.

Noting that this approach is based on sound science developed for important forage species, the Menhaden Management Board agreed to include it as one of two ERP options to be offered in Draft Amendment 3, which will go out once again for public comment early this fall before it is approved for implementation next year.

“The choice is simple,” says Ken Hinman, president of *Wild Oceans* and a longtime member of the Menhaden Citizen Advisory Panel. “We can enact new, widely-accepted abundance targets and fishing limits for Atlantic menhaden designed to protect its ecological role **now**, through Amendment 3, or we can study the problem *ad infinitum*, while keeping in place a plan that allows the fishing industry to continue taking more and more menhaden out of the water every year.”

**Our recommended approach for conserving forage fish is now part of Menhaden Draft Amendment 3.**

*Wild Oceans* first recommended what it calls “the 75% solution” in 2009 when we submitted to the Menhaden Board and its science advisors a paper entitled

“Ecological Reference Points for Atlantic Menhaden.” In 2015 we published a lengthy report, Resource Sharing: The Berkeley Criterion, which explains the need for precaution in managing forage fish and summarizes the scientific and policy consensus around what has become a 75% rule-of-thumb for conserving key prey species like menhaden. <https://wildoceans.org/publications/>

Draft Amendment 3 also addresses outstanding issues of how the fish are allocated between the reduction and bait fisheries and among the states.

“It is important that this amendment adopt the fairest approach to allocating a resource that belongs to the residents of all 15 ASMFC member states,” says Hinman, “However, we consider how the fish are allocated between the fisheries and the coastal ecosystem paramount, because it addresses the needs of all the Commission’s constituents; not just the directed fisheries but also the many predator species that depend on menhaden as prey and the valuable commercial and recreational fisheries targeting these dependent species from Maine to Florida.” ■



## University of Virginia student joins our team to research impacts of climate change

Climate change and warming ocean waters are affecting ocean life and the fisheries that depend on our marine resources. As a research intern for *Wild Oceans*, Megan Carpenter, a fourth year student at the University of Virginia, will investigate how conditions brought about by climate change might disrupt the ocean food web, separating predators from their prey. Megan will describe these impacts and suggest potential fishery management strategies to adapt to these changes. Her work will culminate in a special report that *Wild Oceans* will disseminate to fishing and conservation groups, fishery managers and the general public.

“I’m excited to work for *Wild Oceans* to promote and protect the vibrant life that our oceans have to offer,” said Megan.

*Wild Oceans* staff is equally as excited to have Megan onboard. Her research is important and timely as fishery management councils are currently grappling with methods to make fisheries more resilient in the face of climate change. ■



# Staff travel log

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, *Wild Oceans* executive director Pam Lyons Gromen, who serves as an Advisory Panel (AP) member to the Mid-Atlantic Council's Mackerel, Squid and Butterfish (MSB) Committee, participated in a joint AP/Committee meeting in **Baltimore, Maryland** to discuss an amendment to address capacity in the Northeast squid fisheries. Pam advocated for updating the MSB fishery management plan (FMP) objectives to recognize and protect the role of mackerel, squid and butterfish as forage, consistent with the Council's newly approved policy on forage fish. Pam also supported the development of options to prevent localized squid depletion around Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, an issue brought to the table by concerned anglers and citizens in the community surrounding the islands. Ken followed up on these recommendations at the full Council meeting in **Baltimore** on December 12. Although both issues were regrettably removed from the amendment, the Council made revising the MSB FMP objectives a 2017 priority.

Pam traveled to **Portsmouth, New Hampshire** on December 6<sup>th</sup> to testify at a hearing on Amendment 3 to the interstate management plan for menhaden. (See page 6 to learn more about *Wild Oceans*' position.)

A second Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) workshop for Atlantic sea herring was hosted by the New England Council December 7-8 in **Portsmouth, New Hampshire**. Pam, who was a participant in the first MSE workshop held in May, attended to provide input regarding metrics and parameters for an Atlantic herring control rule that would safeguard the role of herring as forage when catch limits are set. Control rule options widely supported by workshop participants are now undergoing peer review.

After submitting written comments on January 4<sup>th</sup> and participating in a January 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel, *Wild Oceans* president Ken Hinman attended the ASMFC Menhaden Management Board meeting

in **Alexandria, Virginia** on February 1<sup>st</sup>. The purpose of the meeting was to review comments received from the public on potential options for inclusion in Draft Amendment 3 to the interstate management plan for menhaden; specifically, how to allocate menhaden among the bait and reduction fisheries and between the fisheries and its many predators in the coastal ecosystem. With regard to the latter objective, as we report on page 6, the approach promoted by *Wild Oceans* is among those included in the Draft Amendment.

*Wild Oceans* chairman Tim Choate and president Ken Hinman spent February 15<sup>th</sup> in **Washington, D.C.**, visiting senators and members of Congress to talk about tying up loose ends in billfish conservation. After a long but successful day on Capitol Hill, we were pleased that a bipartisan group of influential senators introduced new legislation amending the Billfish Conservation Act. See page 4.

Theresa travelled to the NMFS headquarters in **Long Beach, California** to meet with the leadership of the Highly Migratory Species Branch about our priorities for 2017 which include authorizing deep set buoy gear in the Pacific and setting a more conservation minded rebuilding target on Pacific Bluefin Tuna internationally.

On February 28, Theresa attended a Recreational Fishing Regional Roundtable Meeting in **Long Beach, California**, hosted by NMFS to continue building a strong partnership between recreational fishermen and NOAA Fisheries by listening to the concerns and interests of fishermen and collaboratively exploring solutions.

*Wild Oceans* board member Stephanie Choate was an ambassador for *Wild Oceans* at the Miami Boat Show (February 16-20 in **Miami, Florida**) and during the Jimmy Johnson Tournament (March 10-11 in **Key Largo, Florida**). Stephanie designed and produced a special edition *Wild Oceans* T-shirt that she gave to visitors in exchange for an at-will donation, raising nearly \$2,000 to support our work.



The annual *Wild Oceans* Board of Directors meeting was held in **Islamorada, Florida** on January 17<sup>th</sup>. Ken, Pam and Theresa joined the Board for a recap of the year's successes and for a discussion of ongoing work and new priorities for 2017. Following the board meeting, friends of *Wild Oceans*, Doug and Jodi Mientkiewicz, hosted a fun-filled evening to raise funds for and promote awareness of our conservation programs. *Wild Oceans* staff and board teamed up to deliver personal accounts of why they support *Wild Oceans* and its mission. A treasure trove of baseball memorabilia, donated by retired professional baseball great Doug Mientkiewicz, along with sport fishing art, fine wine and fishing excursions, were featured in a silent auction that raised over \$20,000 for *Wild Oceans*! In a special presentation, board member Stephanie Choate, who dedicated numerous hours to coordinating the silent auction, joined her first place fishing team from the 2016 Big Blue Challenge to present *Wild Oceans* with a portion of their winnings. "As anglers, we receive so much from the ocean. I strongly believe in giving back and challenge other anglers to do the same," said Choate.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council met in **Vancouver, Washington** from March 7-13. Theresa attended the meeting as well as ancillary meetings of the Ecosystem Work Group, Scientific and Statistical Committee and Highly Migratory Species Monitoring Team. The Council received the Annual State of the California Current Ecosystem Report, reviewed Fishery Ecosystem Plan initiatives, received updates on the existing deep-set buoy gear exempted fishing permits and reviewed 8 new applications for testing buoy gear. ■

GIVING BACK TO PROTECT AND HEAL THE OCEAN

# Riviera towel company raises funds for wild oceans

As a lean and mean non-profit that dedicates our resources to the issues, not to self-promotion, we are thrilled when our work is recognized and honored in the business world. *Wild Oceans* is proud to be named a "world class" organization by the Riviera Towel Company and to be the beneficiary of funds raised through sales of the company's Biarritz towel line.

"We like to think our collections are more than beautiful towels; to us they are the embodiment of our desire to protect and restore our oceans on a global scale," explain Shannon and Albert DiPadova, the company's founders.

The boldly striped Biarritz towels are ideal for fishermen, beachgoers, boaters and travelers, as they dry quickly and pack small. These finely-loomed Turkish cotton towels can also be used as scarves, sarongs, light blankets, tablecloths, or picnic blankets! Check out the Biarritz Towel Collection, available in an array of colors, on the Riviera Towel Company's web site.

<https://rivieratowel.com/collections/all/products/biarritz-towel> ■



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