

Jun 7, 2021, 05:19am EDT | 319 views

The Promise Of Sustainable Fisheries: A Chat With Actor, Sam Waterston



Daphne Ewing-Chow Senior Contributor ⓘ
Food & Drink

Follow

Sam Waterston is not your typical Golden Globe Award winning, Oscar nominated actor. The 81-year old thespian, producer and director has testified multiple times before congress on ocean-related issues, has been arrested twice at climate protests at the Capitol, is a Board member of non-profit, [Oceana](#), and travels the world speaking to audiences on issues facing the marine environment. His contribution to ocean advocacy has also earned him a featured position at the 2021 [UN World Oceans Day Annual Event](#) produced in partnership with [Oceanic Global](#) on June 8 alongside oceanographer Sylvia Earle, Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres, and Jean-Michel Cousteau oceanographic explorer and son of ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau.

“Growing up in New England, I learned early on why oceans matter, first in a time of seemingly boundless plenty, and then, in the face of a stunning collapse,” says the actor and activist of the collapse of the U.S. cod fishery, once one of New England’s largest marine industries. As a child, the Massachusetts native believed that the bountiful stocks of prized Atlantic cod were inexhaustible— but due to over fishing, fisheries mismanagement and climate change, he would begin to witness the devastating impacts of unsustainable fishing practices.



Fishermen mend groundfishing nets on Merrill Wharf in Portland, Maine, one of the two critical areas ... [+] ASSOCIATED PRESS

Over fishing, or when fish are caught faster than stocks can replenish, is one of the main drivers of ocean wildlife depletion. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 29% of the world's fish stocks are over fished and 61% are fully fished, posing major threats to marine ecosystems and coastal livelihoods.

Waterston believes that one of the ways that balance can be restored to ocean habitats is through sustainable fisheries that ensure the long-term health and stability of species and the greater marine ecosystem.

He also believes in the power of advocacy and education to create awareness around marine conservation and sustainable fishing practices.

“More than 70% of our planet is ocean. Three billion of us and more depend on oceans for our livelihoods. And our oceans are our biggest ally in the fight

against climate change, the biggest threat we face on this planet. As we look ahead to building back better, our oceans must be front and center,” he says.

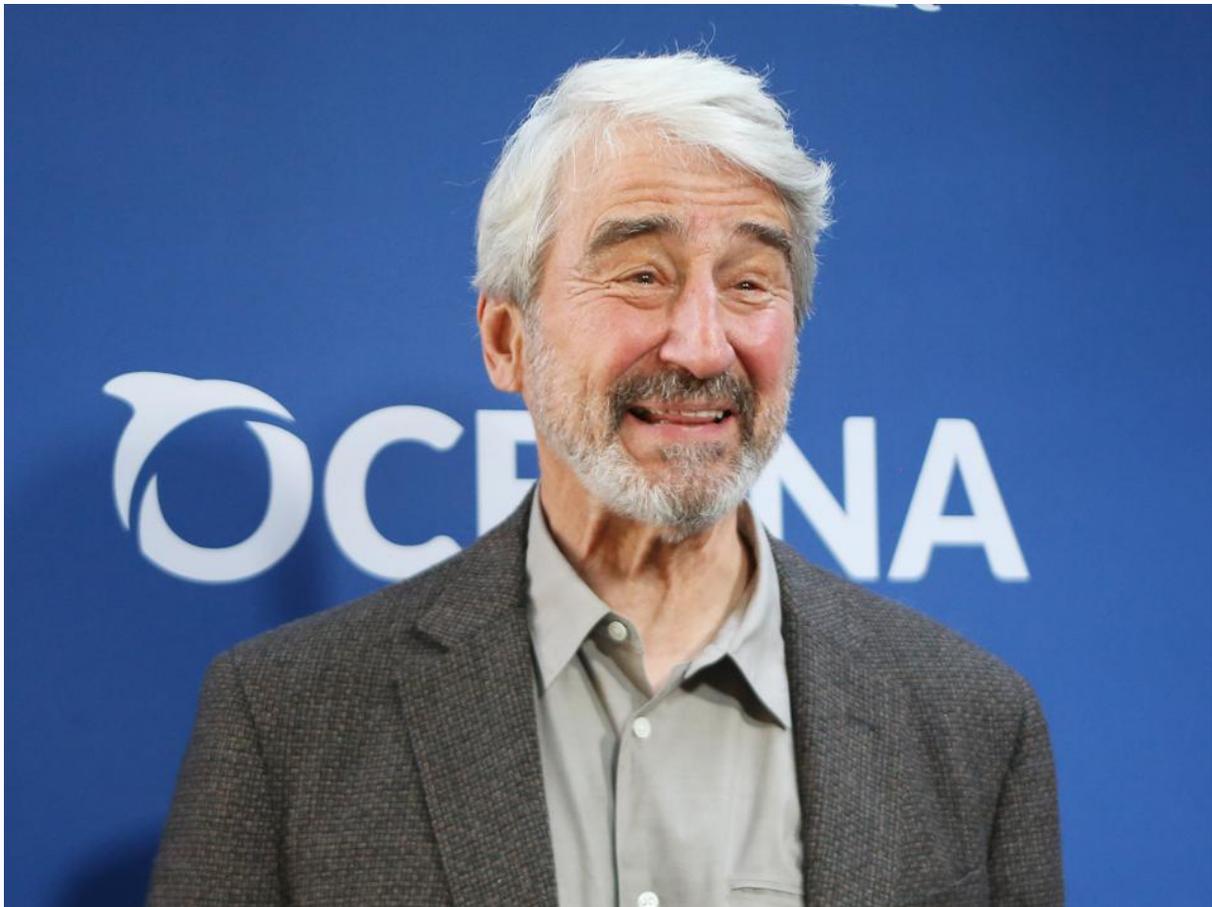
MORE FOR YOU

The Biggest Career Crashes Of 2020

Sovereignty And The Soil: Chief Richard Currie And The Rising Of The Maroon Nation In Jamaica

The Food And Agriculture Legacy Of Mama Sarah, Barack Obama’s Late Step-Grandmother

I spoke with Sam Waterston about sustainable fisheries, the power of his voice as a famous actor and the role of UN World Oceans Day in educating the public.



Sam Waterston is a member of the board of Oceana FILMMAGIC

Forbes | Daily Dozen Newsletter

Always be the most interesting person in the room.

Get the top stories from Forbes, hand-curated by the editors, and delivered straight to your inbox every weekday morning.

**Sign
Up**

You may opt out any time. By signing up for this newsletter, you agree to the [Terms and Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Daphne Ewing-Chow: Do you believe that there is such a thing as sustainable fisheries?

Sam Waterston: Yes, certainly, definitely, I do. Some years ago, fellow Oceana board member Dr. Daniel Pauly taught me the fisheries science term for it: Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), which is the most fish that you can catch and still maintain the species population size. When properly implemented, science-based fisheries management makes fishing sustainably and even rebuilding collapsed fish populations possible. It's happening right now here in the United States. That's good news, as we have more mouths to feed on this planet. It's the basis of Oceana's campaign to save the oceans and help feed the world. But MSY itself isn't the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is ocean abundance, with all that it promises for the hungry, and a stable and prosperous life— our life and all life on earth.

Daphne Ewing-Chow: What is the importance of United Nations (UN) World Oceans Day?

Sam Waterston: The UN can be a big help in getting all the citizens of the planet, who are its constituents, to see how much we, and all of life on Earth, depend on the magnificent oceans, see the trouble they're in from our action

and inaction, and realize their enormous capacity for resilience, when we give them the chance. Many people don't know these things. World Oceans Day is just the beginning, and the UN taking such a leading role in it is encouraging and real cause for hope.

Daphne Ewing-Chow: What is the role of actors, musicians, artists, photographers and other creatives in supporting the movement to save the worlds' oceans?

Sam Waterston: It is to point— to direct attention to the people and the organizations, like Oceana, that are finding solutions to the myriad of problems that we human beings have created for the oceans. We all get a flood of information every day, and it's harder and harder to tell fact from fiction. People fortunate to be in the public eye need to speak up for the facts. It's shameful that so many people, in a position to be heard, deny climate change, rising ocean temperatures, the role of fossil fuels, and other man-made stressors, on the oceans we depend on for life.

Daphne Ewing-Chow: Are you confident in the future of the oceans?

Sam Waterston: I am unequivocally confident that we can restore the health and abundance of our oceans. This is a man-made problem that I believe we will solve. That isn't pie-in-the-sky optimism. I've seen the evidence. I've seen firsthand the damage that fisheries mismanagement has done to the life of seaside towns and the healing power of Oceana's science-based, results-oriented campaigns for an abundant ocean.

I've seen the flood of single-use plastic polluting our oceans and countries taking bold legislative action to turn off the tap, as Chile did just last month. I've seen Belize's Mesoamerican reef – the second largest barrier reef in the world – besieged by the threats of destructive bottom trawling, gillnetting, and offshore oil drilling, and the power of local Belizean communities taking a stand, united to defend their home and healthy ocean-borne livelihoods. And succeeding. Belize's oceans and people are now protected from those

threats because they spoke up. We can use our voices and our actions to restore our oceans to abundance.

Daphne Ewing-Chow: How did your experience growing up in New England and witnessing the depletion of the cod fishery bring you closer to the ocean, to your purpose as an ocean activist?

Sam Waterston: For centuries, the cod fishery supported the economic and cultural backbone of a good many communities near me. We even named our most famous cape after them! Going all the way back to indigenous Americans prior to European contact, cod was king. And there were a lot of them! Alexandre Dumas wrote in the 19th century that if every cod egg reached maturity, you could walk across the Atlantic on their backs. As a boy standing on the shore looking out on the blue horizon, I too believed the sea was inexhaustible. Then one day, the fishery collapsed, suddenly making it plain that the ocean can only give so much. That collapse is what eventually led me to Oceana and activism.

It's too bad it takes a big loss so often, to open our eyes and build the conviction necessary to change. Well, our eyes should be wide open now! Fisheries mismanagement and collapse, climate disruption, from storms to wildfires, ocean warming and pollution, from DDT to plastic, the Anthropocene Age and species extinction from human activity, are all out there in the open and plain to anyone willing to look. So, now we know. We also know, since humans did this, humans can undo it. The call of UN World Oceans Day is to get the necessary undoing done.



Daphne Ewing-Chow

Follow

I'm an environmental writer with a focus on food and agriculture, and commute between the Southern Caribbean (Barbados) and the Northern Caribbean (Cayman Islands). I... **Read More**

Reprints & Permissions

ADVERTISEMENT