

Although [EPA is beginning to pay attention](#), the rapidly increasing acidity of the oceans remains a little-known consequence of global atmospheric CO₂ loading. But two recent events may be raising the public profile of ocean acidification.

First, a National Research Council committee convened to examine the consequences of ocean acidification and make recommendations for a federal research program issued [its report](#). Among its conclusions:

The chemistry of the ocean is changing at an unprecedented rate and magnitude due to anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions; the rate of change exceeds any known to have occurred for at least the past hundreds of thousands of years. Unless anthropogenic CO₂ emissions are substantially curbed, or atmospheric CO₂ is controlled by some other means, the average pH of the ocean will continue to fall. Ocean acidification has demonstrated impacts on many marine organisms. While the ultimate consequences are still unknown, there is a risk of ecosystem changes that threaten coral reefs, fisheries, protected species, and other natural resources of value to society.

In other words, the oceans are changing drastically and rapidly, and that matters in and of itself, not just because they are exhausting their ability to buffer atmospheric CO₂.

Second, the Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation [held a hearing](#) on the economic and environmental consequences of ocean acidification.

Its just a start, but its good to see this issue getting more notice. Maybe ocean acidification is even more abstract than climate change, but I think not. Shellfish producers and scientists testified that clams are [literally dissolving before they can mature](#). Its hard to imagine a better illustration of just how disruptive climate change is to natural systems, and to human expectations of those systems.