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## **PBS' "Journey to Planet Earth" Gives a Dire Warning on the Earth's Oceans**

*By David Hinckley*  
New York Daily News

At least no one can say this latest documentary on what's happening with our environment is too dry.

It focuses on the planet's oceans, and it won't surprise anyone who's been paying attention that the news is not encouraging.

The waters are rising, which could have dire consequences for tens of millions of people, and we're heedlessly destroying many of the ocean's critical resources, like, for instance, its fish.

All this is hardly a new warning, meaning it may be dismissed by some skeptics as either reheated Al Gore or overheated panic.

But the program makes a persuasive case that significant change is under way, and suggests that with environmental crises, as with our current economic downturn, those who pay attention to early warning signs find themselves better equipped once the problem becomes acute.

It doesn't hurt the program's appeal that Matt Damon does the narration, though he isn't out in the field talking with research scientists. He's more the connecting voice, setting a tone that's firm and at times ominous.

This "Journey" breaks roughly into two parts, with the first focusing on our reckless exploitation of ocean resources, most prominently fish.

Overfishing of cod on the Georges Bank in the North Atlantic has led to such depletion that there is almost no cod industry left. That has devastated New Bedford, Mass., and cities in Portugal that were built on this industry and now find much of their economic support gone.

The possible ray of light, that in the future we could try to maintain a sustainable level of fishing, is dimmed by a couple of other facts. For one, scientists calculate that worldwide we have caught 90% of the ocean's large fish and are now working on the last 10%.

The second part of the show focuses on our good friend, global warming. It breaks no new ground but serves more as a primer that tries to explain the human consequences of major ice melts that raise sea levels.

If the seas rise three feet, which could happen within decades, half the rice fields of Bangladesh would be submerged and useless. That would drive tens of millions of people out of their coastal areas and into cities already morbidly overcrowded.

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As with most environmental warnings, “Journey” tries to paint a dire picture without suggesting we’re doomed and there is nothing we can do about it.

It does suggest, however, that if we stay the course, we will hasten the day when that will be true.

