

## To save the oceans, zone them

By Justin Moyer, Published: December 14

Nuclear power plants and Mexican restaurants don't mix. To keep fission reactors away from pico de gallo, governments zone neighborhoods, preventing utilities from annoying businesses and businesses from annoying homeowners.

According to some researchers, the same kind of zoning that might prevent Virginia from building the Silver Line through your back yard could also protect a place without back yards: the ocean.

"If you zone the sea, you can separate incompatible purposes," says Elliott Norse, chief scientist at the Marine Conservation Institute, a nonprofit he founded in 1996. "You can give everyone a chance to do what they need."

Unlike a ban on offshore drilling, ocean zoning would allow what Norse calls "extractive activities" but would limit them to specific areas. Australia successfully tried zoning in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in the 1970s, Norse says; [President Obama has proposed such a policy](#), but the House defunded it in May.

How much of the ocean should be declared off-limits to hooks, harpoons and oil wells?

"A really good compromise that would allow us to save nearly all species of marine life would be to save 20 percent of each biogeographic region," Norse says. The current set-aside? According to Norse, just 1.2 percent, resulting in the loss of fish from the waters of Israel, New England and [the Chesapeake Bay](#) — which, he says, is "much more like a soup of algae than a place that used to be lined with oysters."

And for Ariel and Nemo, time is running out.

"The fire is already spreading in the basement, and no one seems to be running down there with fire extinguishers or hoses," Norse says. "Right now we are having a low-level conversation about what to do and not acting nearly fast enough."

— Justin Moyer, Outlook editorial aide