



Heal the Ocean Stays the Course in Finding Pollution Solutions

Looking forward to the future while celebrating its 10th anniversary, the Santa Barbara organization has become an international model.

By [Tracy Shawn, Noozhawk Contributor](#) | Published on 08.18.2008



For 10 years now, [Heal the Ocean](#) has been shining the light on marine pollution and its causes. Here, executive director Hillary Hauser explores the [Goleta Sanitary District's](#) outfall. (Jim Knowlton photo)

Ten years ago, Hillary Hauser became outraged when Santa Barbara beaches started closing. In response, she wrote a newspaper commentary that sparked a public protest over polluted waters.

On Aug. 19, 1998, while the demonstration was in full form in front of the [County Administration Building](#), Hauser and Santa Barbara attorney Jeffrey Young (now chairman of the [Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board](#)), co-founded [Heal the Ocean](#). Under the umbrella of the [Jean-Michel Cousteau Institute](#), Heal the Ocean became a nonprofit organization with Hauser as its executive director.

Heal the Ocean's primary philosophy is that the ocean no longer can be used as a dump. Armed with this simple, yet profound, premise, the group has been diligently working to make this a reality.

Hauser says one of Heal the Ocean's biggest accomplishments has been to help get seven miles of beach property — a stretch of land that includes Rincon, Sand Point, Sandyland and Padaro Lane — approved for hooking into the public sewer line instead of private septic systems.

It's an important victory because, as Hauser says, septic systems often leach into groundwater. Since septic systems rely on the properties of soil to filter waste, there is a very high rate of unreliable filtration process, especially in coastal zones with high-density septic systems, sandy soils and shallow groundwater. Depending on the area, the groundwater then flows to creeks, rivers and, in coastal communities, straight to the ocean — human contamination included.

Another hard-fought achievement of Heal the Ocean has been to facilitate the legal route for the [Goleta Sanitary District](#) to work toward upgrading its system from a blend of primary — which only takes solids out — and secondary-treated sewage to a complete secondary system. This upgrade allows for much cleaner output.



Heal the Ocean executive director Hillary Hauser and world champion surfer [Shaun Tomson](#) testified at a recent hearing on the Rincon sewer project, a case that recently was settled in Ventura Superior Court. (Jon Shafer photo / www.rinconsurfblog.com) Heal the Ocean received a \$333,000 [State Water Resources Control Board](#) grant to track the travel of treated wastewater once it is discharged into the ocean. The [Shallow Ocean Wastewater Outfall Source Tracking Project](#) gives Heal the Ocean the opportunity to use high technology to battle this kind of outfall.

Hauser says the study is focused on the [Montecito Sanitary District](#) because the discharge in the area falls into 35 feet of water. She says Hammonds Beach, which is near the outfall, is listed as an impaired beach by the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

The tracking project is just one of many studies Heal the Ocean engages in and, as Hauser says, “works on getting rid of the problems.”

Heal the Ocean is based in Santa Barbara but has become an international model. Coastal communities from Chile to Hawaii have contacted the group for help and education derived from its research.



Rock star [Jack Johnson](#) has been a close friend to Heal the Ocean and its executive director, Hillary Hauser. Johnson is [helping the organization with fundraising](#) as part of his Aug. 27 concert at UCSB’s Harder Stadium. (Luca Trovato photo)

Hauser says continued management efforts are important, particularly amid the effects of global warming and dire alarms such as growing “dead zones” in the ocean, where nothing can live. A dead zone off Oregon is growing at the rate of a football field each day.

“The ocean is powerful. It is the reason we can live on this planet — it creates oxygen, clouds, rain, fresh water,” Hauser says. “It is time to respect this force.”

As Heal the Ocean’s flags wave on State Street in downtown Santa Barbara until Aug. 29, it’s a time not only to admire, but to consider. [Click here](#) for more information on Heal the Ocean or call 805.965.9060.

Meanwhile, as part of Heal the Ocean’s 10th anniversary celebration, [Jack Johnson](#), a [UCSB](#) alumnus and the king of “green rock ‘n’ roll,” will help Heal the Ocean and other local environmental groups raise funds. Johnson’s charity, the Johnson Ohana Charitable Foundation, will match every dollar donated online or at his Aug. 27 concert at [Harder Stadium](#) to [All At Once](#) nonprofit partners, up to \$2,500. [Click here](#) to make a donation and designate Heal the Ocean as the beneficiary. Donor names will be entered in a drawing for two free tickets to the concert.

Tracy Shawn is a local freelance writer who writes about sustainability issues as a Noozhawk contributor.