

Group wants 'Nemo' classified as endangered species

September 17 2012, by Erika Bolstad

An environmental group asked the U.S. government on Thursday to consider classifying the orange clownfish - Nemo, to a whole generation of children - as endangered.

The growing acidity of the ocean threatens the tiny fish's coral reef habitat, the [Center for Biological Diversity](#) said in its petition, which asks for the orange clownfish to be protected along with seven species of similarly coral-dependent [damselfish](#).

"As we continue to emit [greenhouse gas pollution](#), we are seeing more and more animals and plants in the U.S. and around the world that are in danger from climate change," Shaye Wolf, the [climate science](#) director for the center, an Arizona-based advocacy and environmental law organization, said in an interview. "This case is important because not a lot of people understand how much the ocean is being harmed by carbon pollution."

Orange clownfish aren't found in U.S. waters; they live primarily in the Pacific Ocean near Australia. But many of the other fish are in U.S. waters, and the government has a long history of protecting species in other parts of the world.

Orange clownfish became well known in popular culture with the 2003 Pixar film "Finding Nemo," about a fish of the same name who gets separated from his father.

The world's oceans absorb much of the [carbon pollution](#) from emissions from power plants, automobiles and other manmade sources. Their rising acidity is an area of increased concern, in part because the effects are so obvious.

Over the past seven or eight years, [ocean acidification](#) has resulted in visible, declining yields in the shellfish industry in the Pacific Northwest, said John Guinotte, a marine biogeographer from the Marine Conservation Institute, an [advocacy organization](#) in Washington state. The change in [ocean chemistry](#) makes it difficult for creatures that make use of [calcium carbonate](#) construction, which include corals and shellfish.

"There's no silver-bullet quick fix for this," Guinotte said.

As with the polar bear before it, there's little chance that an endangered-species listing for Nemo would do much to address the carbon emissions that are leading to its loss of habitat. When federal regulators determined that the bears are a threatened species, they created a rule that effectively limited the consideration of the effects of greenhouse gas emissions as they worked to address the bears' loss of habitat in Alaska.

The Center for Biological Diversity has had success with other marine life petitions, however. It's one of the most prolific filers of endangered species petitions, and in 2006 it successfully protected two Caribbean coral species under the Endangered Species Act. It petitioned to protect 83 other corals in the Caribbean, Hawaii and the Indo-Pacific in 2009.

The orange clownfish is a powerful symbol familiar to most Americans, Wolf said, particularly as the Oscar-winning "Finding Nemo" is about to be rereleased.

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Citation: Group wants 'Nemo' classified as endangered species (2012, September 17) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-group-nemo-endangered-species.html>

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