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Protecting the Ocean

UC Santa Barbara marine biologist and conservation ecologist Benjamin Halpern is among 10 recipients of a 2017 Peter Benchley Ocean Award.

Often referred to as the “Academy Awards for the Ocean,” the honor recognizes a diverse group of marine leaders whose collective efforts cover a range of important global conservation solutions. Among them are creating and vastly expanding marine protected areas, mitigating overfishing, reducing marine pollution and addressing climate change.

Halpern, director of the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis and a professor at the campus’s Bren School of Environmental Science & Management, is recognized for his work to provide cutting-edge marine science that has advanced the understanding of ocean processes, marine ecology and conservation biology.

“With a campus surrounded by the ocean, UCSB takes the health of our marine environments very seriously, and that’s part of why I am so proud to call Ben Halpern one of our esteemed faculty members,” said Steve Gaines, dean of the Bren School. “He has been a tireless leader in many areas of marine science, so I am extremely pleased that he is receiving national recognition for his groundbreaking research and global efforts to improve the health of our oceans.”

Halpern is renowned for research that analyzes a broad range of complex questions spanning local to global scales, spatial population dynamics, food web interactions and conservation planning for ocean and freshwater ecosystems, with the primary

goal of informing and facilitating effective ocean conservation and resource management. Specifically, he has led and participated in several groundbreaking research projects that have increased our knowledge regarding the state of the world's oceans and the potential for marine reserves to improve ocean conditions, including the development and mapping of cumulative impact assessments and as the lead scientist for the Ocean Health Index project.

"It's really exciting and a great honor to receive this award," said Halpern. "It's also humbling to be in the company of the other awards winners, who have all done really amazing work on behalf of the ocean."

Among the 2017 Peter Benchley Ocean Awards winners are an Indonesian leader who is the driving force behind Asia's fierce crackdown on illegal fishing activity and slavery; two U.S. senators who have actively championed the creation and expansion of huge marine wilderness parks; three innovative regional teams whose collaborations are finding new ways to use and protect our public seas; a brother and sister duo who have dedicated half of their young lives to helping save the seas from oil, plastic and other forms of pollution; and a grassroots leader whose pioneering use of local fishing knowledge is transforming Maine's fisheries.

Halpern is the third Bren faculty member to receive a Peter Benchley Ocean Award. Last year, professor Chris Costello was recognized with the Excellence in Solutions award, and Gaines was honored for Excellence in Science in 2014.

Cofounded by ocean conservation and policy advocate Wendy Benchley and author and Blue Frontier Executive Director David Helvarg, the awards are named in honor of "Jaws" author Peter Benchley, who worked for 40 years educating the public on shark and ocean conservation issues through his numerous books, films, documentary programs, articles for National Geographic and public appearances. Founded in 2003, Blue Frontier is a U.S.-based marine conservation activist organization that works to establish a nationwide network of grassroots lobbyists.

The awards will be presented May 11 in Washington, D.C.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community

of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.