**“Problems by the Sea”**

**CARACOL, Haiti** (Achieve3000, July 2, 2015).Surrounded on three sides by water, Haiti is a country where people like their seafood. But Haiti's waters are severely overfished, with only small, young fish left to catch. Fishermen on the northern coast must travel three hours in a boat to the Dominican Republic if they want a catch big enough for a meal.

Overfishing is just one of the major environmental challenges that Haiti's coast is experiencing. Most of the country's forests have been cut down to make charcoal for cooking fuel, leaving only about 2 to 3 percent of its original forest cover. The resulting soil erosion dumps smothering silt along the coastal shelf, clogging the country's coral reefs.

Haitian conservationist Jean Wiener is trying to change this. Wiener is leading a homegrown campaign to protect the country's northern coastal areas. These include barrier reefs and threatened [mangrove forests](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16675&step=19&c=1&asn=) that serve as crucial spawning grounds and nurseries for fish and crustaceans.

"We can't be constantly counting on others to do things for us," Wiener said. "A lot of [non-Haitian] people don't have a [vested interest](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16675&step=19&c=1&asn=) in seeing anything change, whereas we really do."

Wiener's nonprofit group is known as the Foundation for the Protection of Marine Biodiversity. The group triumphed in 2014 when its campaign to create the country's first protected marine area ended in success. The nearly 222,400-acre (90,000-hectare) zone, which includes Three Bays National Park, was carved out of northern Haiti's overfished Caracol, Limonade, and Fort-Liberté Bays. As much as 20 percent of the country's remaining mangroves are located in the protected zone. They are now illegal to chop down.

But no one enforces the [legislation](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16675&step=19&c=1&asn=), and Wiener acknowledged that there's a long way to go before the new protected marine area becomes more than lines on a map. There just aren't adequate resources to enforce the restrictions.

"For our marine environment, right now at least, there's no law enforcement whatsoever," Wiener said.

Still, scientists have high hopes that the sprawling Three Bays park can eventually help rebuild the severely diminished fish stocks. They foresee the park helping to make Haiti's coastal ecosystems hardier. They point to research showing that fishermen eventually haul in more fish when a patrolled marine reserve nearby provides a safe haven for fish to grow.

But fish are not the group's only concern. In 2014, Wiener's group prepared the first [comprehensive](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16675&step=19&c=1&asn=) report on Haiti's mangroves. It found that the destruction was "extreme." That's because the trees were being used by people who are dependent on charcoal for cooking.

To combat the destruction, another nonprofit group stepped up to the plate. It's working with Haitians near Three Bays to manufacture [briquettes](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=16675&step=19&c=1&asn=) made primarily from sugarcane husks. These are cheaper than the traditional briquettes made from mangrove and other types of wood. They also allow farmers to make money off their agricultural waste.

Even with Wiener's accomplishments, Haiti still faces many challenges. Wiener is hopeful, however. He believes that Haitians share a strong interest in rebuilding the country's environment.

Wiener's belief in his countrymen's vision becomes clear when speaking with Jacqueson Cadet. The 60-year-old fisherman from Caracol is hoping for an easier life for his grandchildren.

"We must make changes or else we won't have any fish or any fishermen left here," Cadet said. "Nobody wants fishing to be an old dream."The Associated Press contributed to this story.