

OPINION

FEATURED LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Damaging vital life-support systems must be criminalized

By David Kyler

Cumulative destruction of life-support systems by reckless profit-makers has become a major threat to life on earth – for both humans and wildlife.

The evidence is disturbing and irrefutable:

- Species extinctions are about a thousand times the historic rate.
- Human fatalities and diseases related to heat, toxic materials, and invasive species spread by global commerce are rampant. The World Health Organization estimates environmental-related human deaths at 10 million annually.
- Marine and land-based food supplies are at escalating risk, posing grave threat of famine deaths in the billions. Recent reports of spiking ocean temperatures that are destroying fishery habitats, combined with crops ruined by drought, flooding, and soil-depletion foreshadow catastrophic reductions in food security.

Yet, many opportunistic businesses still negligently benefit by releasing harmful pollutants – including plastics, chemicals, and heat-trapping emissions – into the world’s atmosphere and waters. Routine waste-dumping in offshore oceans remains a disastrous practice, and despite overwhelming evidence of their destructive impacts, burning fossil-fuels is severely worsening climate impacts, causing at least a trillion dollars in damages annually.

Accordingly, the U.S. must adopt rigorous, well-enforced safeguards by applying principles featured in the European Union’s law defining and authorizing punishment for the crime of ecocide. Ecocide is defined as “unlawful ... acts committed with knowledge that there is ... substantial likelihood of severe and ... widespread or long-term damage to the environment.” Imprisonment of up to 10 years can be imposed on those convicted of it.

Conscientiously criminalizing and prosecuting the destruction of vital life-support systems is critical to our future.

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