



**ABC**  
Australian  
Broadcasting  
Corporation

May 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

## Sustainability questions over fish farming

For years now the world has been warned that overfishing is leading to a chronic shortage of seafood. So in a bid to find a sustainable solution, scientists turned to farming fish.



Now an environmental think tank has produced a report which raises fears about the effects of fish farming.

The Worldwatch Institute says it's having a serious impact on the food chain.

Simon Santow reports.

**SIMON SANTOW:** These days fish eaters are increasingly relying on farmed species to satisfy their appetites. About half of all fish produced worldwide now comes from pens.

**BRIAN HALWEIL:** We've begun to farm laarger and larger fish. That sort of operation is not as efficient.

Compared let's say with farming oysters, farming salmon or even ranching tuna which they're beginning to do the Mediterranean, consumes much more fish for feed that we ultimately get out of those fish farms.

**SIMON SANTOW:** And, says Brian Halweil a senior fellow from the environmental group the Worldwatch Institute, this development is damaging the environment.

**BRIAN HALWEIL:** Historically aquaculture has been very low input. Efficient operations essentially mimicked natural ecosystems. And that's the case when you're raising herbivorous fish that are low on the food chain, like carp, like tilapia or culturing molluscs and shellfish and even raising seaweed which is a major form of aquaculture all across Asia.

But once you begin to raise larger fish and more carnivorous fish that means you have to add a lot of feed to the pens, it means that the larger fish don't naturally cope as well with the living conditions. They behave sort of like cows and pigs and chickens in factory farms. There are disease issues. And as a result there's often much more chemical use.

So that sort of high input industrial aquaculture can actually leak pollutants and other sorts of problems to the surrounding landscape and ultimately have a negative impact on populations of wild fish throughout the world.

SIMON SANTOW: And how are you finding the balance at the moment within aquaculture? Are you finding more of this high impact farming that's going on as opposed to how it first started?

BRIAN HALWEIL: There's no question. Luckily the vast majority of aquaculture on the planet, which actually takes place in Asia, primarily in China, is still relatively sustainable. It's low input, it's fish low on the food chain and these are primarily fish being eaten as a basic staple, very often as part of a subsistence diet.

The most rapid growth is in the production of those high value, high input species - everything from salmon to tuna to farming of shrimp in Asia and beyond. And as long as there's a strong demand for those foods, farmers and fishers everywhere will begin producing them.

SIMON SANTOW: In order to produce the farmed fish, prey fish such as anchovies and herring are being massively overfished too. That's led to a scarcity of fish feed.