



PRESS RELEASE
May 3, 2011

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Fishing for Sustainable Practices to Conserve Fisheries

New analysis highlights need to sustainably manage global fisheries to secure livelihoods and protect ecosystems

Washington, D.C.—Global fish production has reached an all-time high, according to research done by Nourishing the Planet (www.NourishingthePlanet.org) for the Worldwatch Institute’s Vital Signs Online publication. Aquaculture, or fish farming—once a minor contributor to total fish harvest—increased 50-fold between the 1950s and 2008 and now contributes nearly half of all fish produced worldwide.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, an estimated 53 percent of fisheries are considered fully exploited—harvested to their maximum sustainable levels—with no room for expansion in production. Population growth and a higher demand for dietary protein are putting increasing pressure on depleted stocks and threatened ecosystems. Mainstream approaches to fisheries management have focused narrowly on short-term profit and boosting production. Worldwatch’s analysis states that practices will need to shift to more sustainable strategies to meet demand and support fishing communities.

Increased farming of large predators, such as salmon and tuna, has led to overfishing of prey fish—including anchoveta and herring, which are commonly used as fishmeal. It generally takes at least three kilograms of feed to produce one kilogram of salmon. The shrinking of prey species threatens the entire food chain, putting further stress on large predator stocks. “Even as we depend more on farmed fish, a growing scarcity of fish-feed may jeopardize future expansion of the industry,” said Brian Halweil, Worldwatch senior researcher and co-project director of the Institute’s Nourishing the Planet project, a two-year evaluation of agricultural innovations.

This could also negatively affect the economies of developing countries, home to the nearly 60 percent of the world’s fishers that are classified as small-scale commercial or subsistence fishers. In Africa, an estimated 100 million people depend on fish from inland sources, such as lakes and rivers, for income as well as protein and much-needed micronutrients like vitamin A, calcium, iron, and zinc. But coastal fisheries across West Africa have declined by up to 50 percent in the last 30 years due to significant pressure from large industrial fleets.

Fisheries also provide important ecosystem services, such as storing and recycling nutrients and absorbing pollutants. “Fish farmers and the food industry will need to make ecological restoration as much a goal as meeting the growing demand for seafood,” said Danielle Nierenberg, Nourishing the Planet co-project director.

Negotiations are currently under way at the World Trade Organization to establish new rules on fisheries subsidies that would eliminate unfair and environmentally destructive policies while ensuring a level playing-field and abundant resources for all fishers. But top-down fisheries management has had limited success in the past. In contrast, fisheries co-managed by local authorities and fishers themselves have emerged as a promising solution to replenishing depleting fish stocks.

In 2007, a group of Gambian women oyster harvesters formed the TRY Women’s Oyster Harvesting Association. They have collectively agreed to close one tributary in their oyster territories for an entire year and to shorten their harvest season by two months. These practices may seem difficult in the short run, but they pay off over time, securing incomes and nutrition in their communities.

Worldwatch’s Nourishing the Planet project has traveled to 25 countries across sub-Saharan Africa, shining a spotlight on communities that serve as models for a more sustainable future. The project is unearthing innovations in agriculture that can help alleviate hunger and poverty while also protecting the environment. These innovations are elaborated in the recently released report [*State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet*](#). “By focusing on seafood and other often-ignored parts of the food chain, such efforts can help improve livelihoods and protect the ecosystems on which millions of people worldwide depend,” said Nierenberg.

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Notes to Editors:

Journalists can obtain a complimentary copy of this Vital Signs Online publication by contacting Janeen Madan, Communications Associate, Worldwatch Institute (+1) [202-452-1999](tel:202-452-1999) x514, jmadan@worldwatch.org.

For review copies of *State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet*

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About the Worldwatch Institute:

Worldwatch is an independent research organization based in Washington, D.C. that works on energy, resource, and environmental issues. The Institute’s *State of the World* report is published annually in more than 20 languages. For more information, visit www.worldwatch.org.