

## Overfishing



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The problem of overfishing has been known for many years. There were enough warnings and calls for the sustainable management of the oceans, but so far they have not led to any results. On World Environment Day on June 5, 2004, proclaimed in 1972 by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), around 150 states participated worldwide. But according to former UNEP leader Klaus Töpfer, there was not much to celebrate: the oceans that make up 70 percent of the earth's surface, are seriously threatened by overfishing, pollution and other negative environmental factors.

The environmental program of the UNO ([UNEP](#) [2]) clearly explains some background to the worrying situation:

- Oceans contain 90 percent of earth's biomass, from seaweed to blue whale.
- About 3.5 billion people (the number could double in the next 20 years) depend on the seas.
- More than 70 percent of the fish stocks are taken beyond the sustainable levels. The stocks of tuna, cod, swordfish and marlins alone have been reduced by 90 percent in the last century.
- 80 percent of the marine pollution is already occurring ashore. The situation will worsen if, as estimated in 2010, eighty percent of the world's population lives near the coast (radius 100 km).
- Caused by contaminated coastal waters, deaths and illnesses cost 12.8 billion dollars a year
- Plastic waste kills up to a million seabirds a year, 100,000 marine mammals and countless fish.
- Enormous amounts of oil pollute the oceans every year due to unintentional infiltration, illegal pollution from shipping traffic and maritime disasters.
- The sea level has increased by 10-25 cm over the last 100 years and could continue to rise and flood low-lying countries.
- Of the tropical coral reefs off 109 nations, 93 are already severely damaged by the economic development of coastal regions and growing tourism. Although coral reefs cover only 0.5 percent of the seabed, more than 90 percent of the species depend directly or indirectly on them.

At the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, there was also an agreement in principle that marine protected areas should be created by 2012, and by 2015 the contaminated fish stocks replenished. In order to avoid further overfishing, it also called for the elimination of subsidies, which, at an estimated 15 to 20 billion dollars, alone account to 20 percent of fishing industry revenues.

"Fleet overcapacity is responsible for many of the problems the sector faces today. An active policy to limiting fishing capacity and fishing effort is therefore essential. "

Dr. Franz Fischler

In September 2000, Dr. Franz Fischler, Member of the European Commission responsible for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, says that the fisheries sector is in a crisis: "If we... fail to reform, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in the interest of society in general and of the fisheries sector in particular, we will fall into a 'fisheries sclerosis' and the first victims of this inaction will be our fishermen. "

That is to be contradicted! The first victims of human recklessness are still the animals: sterile coral reefs, whose

once-living vivid color can only be admired on films, the endangered cod (remember the cod-wars between England and Iceland!), a record number starved penguins in the Falklands and highly mercury-contaminated marine mammals (Japanese scientists recently found that, in some samples, the concentration of toxic heavy metal exceeded the international limit by more than 5,000 times, and consumption could lead to acute poisoning). The damage to the whales itself does not seem worthy of investigation).

### **The seas are sick!**

And all the animals living in them are threatened not only by the human-caused impurities, but above all, not only as individuals, but also as species, through unrestrained fishing. Human access to ever smaller fish means that the stock of adult animals required for successful reproduction can no longer be maintained. The seas are empty!

The situation is critical: in comparison with 1902, only about one-sixth of the biomass of the seas at that time can be registered, and moreover (according to the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES)), over the past 25 years of mature fish in EU waters has decreased by 90%.

So we are faced with the paradoxical situation that more and more fishing boats are fighting over the remaining ten percent of adult fish. This vicious circle is as well known as it is hard to control. Again and again, national egoisms prevent all reform projects, thereby shattering the prospect of a more sustainable strategy.

### **Fish disappear**

Fishing becomes progressively more difficult. Increasingly long journeys must be made to detect swarms - if they are still to be found at all. Even in the once so fish-rich waters around England, there is increasing an emptiness, and so the likelihood is now very high that the customer gets served imported fish meat at the consumption of National dish Fish & Chips. These imports are by no means a solution, on the contrary: they only export the problem to other regions.

A study in Boston in 2003 examined the situation in the entire North Atlantic (Canada, USA, Europe). The result shocked even the scientists themselves: "We have found that the situation is much worse than expected," said the project leader, Dr. Daniel Pauly from the University of British Columbia, Canada.

If Commissioner Fischler resolutely insists on a fleet reduction of 40% in the face of such a dramatic emergency in European waters, this will sound logical and sensible. It is also supported by many governments. However, those responsible in Spain, France, Portugal, Italy and Greece are far from agreeing with the planned measures. They are not only opposed to reducing fleet capacity, but also strengthening controls and the regulating cross-species catch quotas. However, these opponents of reform are particularly irritated by the planned deletion of subsidies amounting to 460 million euro, which were actually earmarked for the construction and repair of fishing boats over the next four years.

Even though Fischler, as he clearly suggests at every opportunity, does not intend to fundamentally change his strategy, he hopes for a compromise. Perhaps the suggestion could be to use non-subsidized financial resources to develop career alternatives for fishermen, many of whom have already lost their livelihoods. However, the prospects for a satisfactory agreement are not bright, because of all things Spain holds the current EU Presidency and therefore has to play the role of the mediator in this dispute...

But even the most bitter adversary of the reform plans would not have to face the simple question: why should one maintain a fishery infrastructure unchanged when there are no fish to catch soon?

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Weitere Infos:

- See also: living thing animal - [Fish](#) [3]
- [Ending Overfishing](#) [4]: The beautifully animated video explains the course of overfishing. Only in English. As a non-EU member state, we, the easiest way to control fishing via our consumption, can do without fish.
- Reuters/UN/FAO/BBC

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### Links

[1] <https://www.swissveg.ch/fishing?language=en>

[2] <http://www.swissveg.ch/node/126>

[3] <http://www.swissveg.ch/node/49>

[4] <http://youtu.be/F6nwZUkBeas>