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Fishery Statistics Accusation Challenged

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The Ministry of Agriculture denied yesterday an allegation that Chinese officials inflate fishing output statistics, but the ministry vowed nonetheless to improve the methodology for collecting such statistics.

Canadian scientists Reg Watson and Daniel Pauly reported last month that global fish resources are declining while the global fish output announced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has been increasing.

The duo claimed the cause of the increase is that some countries, especially China, reported magnified fishery output to the UN. They alleged that local officials in China consider fishery output growth as a kind of political achievement and thus tend to exaggerate it in the hope of gaining a position promotion.

But Bureau of Fisheries Director-General Yang Jian denied such claims, insisting the fishery output is done according to the country's statistical laws. The publicized numbers have been "basically correct," Yang said.

The country's large fishery output is a result of the rapid development of the country's fishing industry and new seafood products cultivated in China, he said.

The number of motorized fishing boats nationally was 289,682 last year, up from 49,769 in 1980, bureau figures show.

Still, Yang rejected the scientists' claims by explaining that fishery output is not a significant enough part of the economy to make officials believe they could receive promotions from its success.

"Fishery accounts for very little in local economies in China," he said.

Yang also discussed the government's efforts to protect domestic fishery resources.

The government is controlling the manufacture of motorized fishing boats and will lower the number in the water by 30,000 by 2006, Yang said.

And China's fishery output last year experienced a decrease of about 1.35 per cent, Yang added.

