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UN overestimates world fish count

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A new study released just hours ago says the United Nations is significantly overestimating the amount of fish in the world's oceans. Given that one in four jobs in South Florida depends on the oceans, the news is hitting home.

Ask any old-timer about the good old days, and they'll tell you there's a lot fewer fish in the sea nowadays. Fisherman Peter Gladding says: "Some say the fishing's down half of what it was 25 years ago. I'd say it's down 25% of what it was 25 years ago."

And studies say the number of fish and other creatures is dropping dramatically in certain areas. "But the old-timers and the studies have always clashed with what a United Nations group finds. It takes periodic surveys from governments and the fishing industry around the world. They report that, taken globally, there's still plenty of fish in the sea. No reason to scale back." And, remember, the World's Fisheries Management plans are largely built on what the UN says. That's where Daniel Pauly comes in.

Just hours ago, at a conference at the UM Rosenstil School near Miami, his new report dropped a bombshell.

He says the UN estimates are wrong. Because China has been overstating it's catch. And because China is so large, he says it's inflating the UN estimates of how many fish remain.

He says: "It's far worse than we thought it was, because the global figures that have been so far published give the impression that the world catch is increasing. And our report shows that, for 13 years, they've been decreasing."

A key UN official tells NBC 6 that the mistake caused by China is quite possible. Serge Garcia of the UN Food & Agriculture Organization says: "What we can do - and we did in other cases - is make sure that the country revises it's system and come out with better estimate - whether higher or lower - just better estimates."

More and more scientists say, without changes, we are moving toward the brink.

Dr. Ellen Prager, the host of the World Sustainable Fisheries conference at the Rosenstil School, says: "Well, if we have a worldwide collapse of fisheries, we will see malnutrition and economic crisis on a scale that we've never seen."