

RESPONSE TO NATURE REPORT ON CATCH STATISTICS

November 28, 2001

For More Information, Contact [Rod Moore](#), Executive Director

CATCH REPORTING: 2 + 2 DOESN'T EQUAL 5

This week's issue of Nature magazine includes a paper by Drs. Reg Watson and Daniel Pauly of the University of British Columbia which concludes that United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) fish catch statistics should be questioned.

Drs. Watson and Pauly should be commended for bringing to light apparent discrepancies in reported catches and calling for more accurate accounting. Accuracy in catch statistics is a mainstay of fisheries management, which is why the West Coast Seafood Processors Association (WCSPA) has supported development of electronic reporting methods, expansion of logbook use, innovations in catch sampling, and consistency in fish tickets.

Unfortunately, some reviewers of the paper have jumped to the conclusion that the Watson / Pauly analysis, which demonstrates a recent decline in world landings, equates to a decline in fish stocks and massive overfishing. As professional fisheries managers so often tell us, landings alone are not a positive indicator of the health of fish stocks. Landings are influenced by availability of fish, regulations, long term environmental changes, and even local weather. As WCSPA showed in a recent analysis of the Pacific groundfish fishery, actual catch levels often fall far below what is biologically available.

**(NOTE: the analysis can be viewed on
<http://www.wcspa.com/Overfishing.htm>)**

We agree with Drs. Watson and Pauly that more accurate catch reporting is needed and that the FAO should insist on good data from reporting countries. But, we should not use catch numbers - even accurate catch numbers - to draw the wrong conclusions about the health of fish stocks.

[Return to Press Release Index](#)

[Return to WCSPA Home Page](#)

