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MEDIA REPORTS OCEANS AND COASTS

2001 DECEMBER

UN FISH STOCKS AGREEMENT ENTERS INTO FORCE

The UN Fish Stocks Agreement entered into force on 11 December, following Malta's ratification of the Agreement. Officially called the UN Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, the Agreement sets out principles for the conservation and management of those fish stocks and establishes that such management must be based on the precautionary approach and the best available scientific information. Although Malta's ratification gives the Agreement the 30 instruments necessary for entry into force, certain NGOs have expressed concern that 15 out of the 20 top fishing nations have not ratified. "The world's 20 top fishing nations account for nearly 80% of the world catch," observed Simon Cripps, Director of WWF's Endangered Seas Programme.

Links to further information

UN Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks

http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_fish_stocks.htm

World Wildlife Fund for Nature press release, 11 December 2001

<http://panda.org/news/press/news.cfm?id=2638>

CHINA CHALLENGES FISH STOCKS REPORTING RESEARCH

China has rejected suggestions that it has been consistently over-reporting fishing catches during the past 20 years. In a paper recently published in Nature magazine, scientists Reg Watson and Daniel Pauly from the University of British Columbia found that the amount of seafood landed each year throughout the 1990s had actually been decreasing by 800 million pounds per year, rather than increasing by 700 million pounds, as reported by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Watson and Pauly argued that the difference was a result of inaccurate reporting, with erroneous figures from China significantly impacting the results. The FAO relies on voluntary reporting of catches by countries to estimate global fish stocks.

According to Jane Lubchenco, former president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, "these earthshaking findings are the most significant fishery and food security results in decades... They call into question the very basis of international fisheries management." This new information also raises concerns about aquaculture being the solution to world food supply. "Aquaculture cannot replace wild seafood because so much farmed seafood relies on wild fish for fishmeal," said Watson.

However, Yang Jian, Director General of the Chinese Agriculture Ministry's Bureau of Fisheries, has rejected the research, arguing that "fishing in China has its own characteristics, so that foreign scientists' sampling patterns may not fit China... For example, people in other countries may not eat jellyfish and crab as regularly as the Chinese, and the output of these two aquatic products account for a considerable portion of our total output." Yang also dismissed as inaccurate an earlier statement made by the ministry that a policy in effect until two years ago gave local officials promotions based on reported increases in fishing catches.

Links to further information

Environmental News Network, 29 November 2001

http://enn.com/news/wire-stories/2001/11/11292001/ap_45716.asp

ABC News, 18 December 2001

http://abcnews.go.com/wire/World/ap20011218_366.html

NOVEMBER

JAPAN CRITICIZED OVER WHALING PRACTICES

Japan has started its annual hunt of minke whale and Dall's porpoise in November, in spite of

concerns raised by the International Whaling Commission (IWC), as well as other governments and environmental groups. The U.S. and New Zealand have condemned the Japanese taking of 440 Southern Hemisphere minke whales for "scientific purposes," noting a significant decline in populations. However, Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research has defended the hunt, arguing that it produces valuable scientific information. Critics allege that the meat ends up at Japanese restaurants, rather than being used exclusively for scientific research.

The Japanese whaling fleet also began its hunt of Dall's porpoise, in spite of a resolution passed by the IWC calling for its halt until a population estimate has been carried out. Some estimates suggest that up to 18,000 porpoises are killed in Japanese waters each year, which would represent the largest kill of any whale, dolphin or porpoise in the world. Japan has reportedly declined to take part in the small cetacean subcommittee under the IWC Scientific Committee or to provide information on coastal cetaceans. According to environmental groups, the Dall's porpoise population is being severely over-hunted, and has appeared in Japanese supermarkets labeled as whale meat.

Links to further information

ENN Environmental News Service, 14 November 2001

http://enn.com/news/wire-stories/2001/11/11142001/ap_45572.asp

ENN Environmental News Service, 1 November 2001

http://enn.com/news/enn-stories/2001/11/11012001/s_45430.asp

Environmental Investigation Agency reports

<http://www.eia-international.org/Campaigns/Cetaceans/Updates/index.html>

MEDITERRANEAN STATES PLEDGE TO CUT SEA POLLUTION

Mediterranean states have committed to implement "all necessary measures" to eliminate sea pollution from land-based sources by 2025. The agreement, which was reached mid-November at the 12th Meeting of the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea, applies to land-based sources of pollution, which account for an estimated 80 percent of total pollution in the Mediterranean. Ministers at the meeting also agreed to reduce emissions of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) by 50 percent by 2005 and totally eliminate POPs pollution by 2010. Agreement was also reached on the preparation of a new legal framework on oil pollution, enabling governments to make use of modern technologies like satellites to monitor illegal washing by oil tankers and to take legal action against offenders. Other outcomes of this meeting include the addition of the Mediterranean Whale Sanctuary to the list of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs), and a deal to bind countries involved to create an effective management plan and to guarantee the long-term viability of the area. Delegates also adopted a joint declaration on the protection of the Mediterranean Sea that will be presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

Links to further information

WWF press release, 19 November 2001

<http://www.panda.org/news/press/news.cfm?id=2595>

OCTOBER

WWF FINDS FISHING SUBSIDIES UNDER-REPORTED, URGES REFORM

Subsidies to the fishing industry add up to at least US\$15 billion annually, representing about 20 percent of the total value of the world's commercial fish catch, says the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF). Injudicious fishing subsidies are considered to play a major role in the depletion of global fish stocks. Governments have officially reported annual subsidy levels of US\$13 billion, but a recent WWF study demonstrates that the actual amount is higher, charging governments with under-reporting. The WWF report is said to give detailed new evidence that governments routinely violate legal obligations imposed by the WTO, which requires that countries provide data about their subsidy programmes. "The political question remains whether WTO members will ... commit themselves even to simple and practical steps to ensure that the WTO develops trade rules in a manner that promotes equity and sustainable use of the Earth's natural resources," said Aimée Gonzales of WWF International. "Failure to do so at the ministerial level amounts to the WTO ignoring its own charter and further fuelling public suspicion and mistrust in the institution."

Links to further information

WWF press release, 25 October 2001

<http://panda.org/news/press/news.cfm?id=2554>

SEPTEMBER

CORAL REEF COVERAGE GREATLY EXAGGERATED, SAYS STUDY

Coral reefs cover a significantly smaller area than previously estimated, according to a new World Atlas on Coral Reefs. Developed by the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), the atlas presents the most comprehensive mapping of the world's coral reefs to date.

Commenting on the mapping, Mark Spalding of UNEP-WCMC said previous estimates had been inaccurate in suggesting that reefs occupied an area two to ten times the size area found by the new calculations. The revised estimates suggest that worldwide coral reefs cover just over 284,000 square kilometers, an area half the size of France. In addition, 58% of this area is under threat from human activities, such as the use of explosives in fishing.

In a separate study, scientist Rupert Ormond recently predicted that the world's coral reefs will die within 50 years from rising sea temperatures caused by climate change. Ormond stated that this decline is inevitable even if humans were to stop emitting greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

Links to further information

The World Atlas of Coral Reefs

<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/>

New Scientist, 11 September 2001

<http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99991275>

Reuters newswire, 7 September 2001

<http://www.planetark.org/dailynewsstory.cfm?newsid=12317&newsdate=07-Sep-2001>

2000 DECEMBER

UNEP ESTABLISHES CORAL REEF UNIT

The UN Environment Programme has established a new Coral Reef Unit. The new unit will contribute to ongoing international work on coral reefs, and will participate in the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN), an international collaboration of international organizations that aims to reverse the global trend of coral reef degradation.

Links to further information

UNEP press release, 5 December 2000

<http://www.unep.org/Documents/Default.asp?DocumentID=186&ArticleID=2708>

OCTOBER

GREENPEACE STUDY ON CORAL REEF DAMAGE HIGHLIGHTS ECONOMIC EFFECTS

Greenpeace has released a new study indicating that the Pacific Ocean could lose most of its coral reefs by the end of the century as a result of global warming. The report, "Pacific in Peril: Biological, economic and social impacts of climate change on Pacific coral reefs," also suggests that the economies of countries in the Pacific could suffer significantly as a result of the loss of coral reefs, with major impacts being felt as early as 2020. The report's release coincided with the Ninth Coral Reef Symposium, held in late October

(<http://www.iisd.ca/recent/recoceans.html>). More information on this report is available online at: <http://www.greenpeace.org/pressreleases/climate/2000oct26.html>

JULY

SEABED COUNCIL ADOPTS MINING REGULATIONS

The Council of the International Seabed Authority has adopted the first code covering mineral resources on the ocean bottom beyond national jurisdictions. The regulations - which cover prospecting and exploration for polymetallic nodules - were adopted by consensus following over three years of negotiations. The new regulations build on the legal framework devised under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and are intended as a step toward elaborating a code that could eventually apply to all deep sea mineral exploration and exploitation.

Links to further information

UN press release, 17 July 2000

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000717.sea1694.doc.html>

UN press release, 14 July 2000

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000714.sea1692.doc.html>

JUNE

COMMERCIAL FISH FARMING CAN HARM WILD FISH STOCKS, SAYS STUDY

Contrary to popular opinion, commercial fish farming may not be easing the pressure on wild ocean fish stocks. In fact, it is resulting in an increase in demand for certain ocean fish that could reduce some marine stocks, according to an article published in *Nature*, the scientific journal. The article - written by a group of international researchers - suggests that fish farming, or aquaculture, has increased demand for some ocean fish, as farmed fish are often fed fish meal and oil caught from ocean fish species such as anchovies. The article also notes that the discharging of untreated fish wastes in coastal wetland areas - a reasonably common aquaculture practice - can further harm marine fish species. However, the article also suggests aquaculture's contribution to global fish supplies could become "increasingly positive," and recommends expanding the use of vegetarian diets for farmed fish that could partially substitute for the use of fish meal and fish oil. In addition, it proposes the promotion of environmentally-sound farming practices.

Links to further information

Environmental Defense Fund press release, 28 June 2000

http://www.edf.org/pubs/newsreleases/2000/jun/m_nature.html

CNN-Nature news report, 28 June 2000

<http://www.cnn.com/2000/NATURE/06/28/fish.farming.ap/index.html>

BBC news report, 28 June 2000

<http://news6.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/sci/tech/newsid%5F810000/810335.stm>

Statement by the Institute of Aquaculture, University of Stirling, June 2000

<http://www.stir.ac.uk/Departments/NaturalSciences/Aquaculture/comment.htm>

Nature journal

<http://www.nature.com/nature/>