

West African Fish Stocks Halved by Foreign Fleets

DAKAR, Senegal, July 3, 2002 (ENS) - West Africa has lost half of its stocks of bottom fishes in the last 20 years, a world authority on global fisheries trends warned at a symposium here last week. The conservation group WWF is calling on the European Union to work with West African nations to avert a potentially catastrophic collapse in fish populations that provide food and income in countries such as Senegal and Mauritania.

At a June 28 press conference of WWF and the Sea Around Us Project based at the University of British Columbia, Canada, fisheries expert Dr. Daniel Pauly said, "The bottom fish biomass off the coast of Northwest Africa has now declined to less than a quarter of its value in 1950 while similar trends are occurring further south along the African coast all the way to Namibia."

The press conference took place at an international symposium in Dakar where Dr. Pauly and other members of the Sea Around Us Project presented papers showing the extent of the exploitation of West African fish resources.

"Despite a nearly threefold increase in fishing activity, catches of bottom fishes off the coast of Northwest Africa have been stagnating since the mid-1970s around two million tonnes," said Dr. Pauly

Claude Martin, director-general of WWF International, called on the European Union to take an international lead in preserving fish stocks off the coast of West Africa.

"A collapse of fish stocks in West Africa could have significantly more serious human consequences than in Europe and North America," said Martin. "The reform of the European Union's fisheries policy provides an

ideal opportunity to reverse its overexploitation of the fish resources of West Africa."

Exploitation of West Africa's fish resources by foreign fleets has increased six fold from the 1960s to 1990s.

"The European Union, Russia and Asian countries are mainly responsible for overexploiting the fish resources, which ought to be providing food for Africa now and in the future," said Martin.

In addition to promoting sustainable use of marine resources, WWF has established a marine program based in Dakar and launched a campaign to reduce the negative impact of European fishing fleets on developing countries.