

## **World Summit on Salmon considers salmon population - Scientists say hard decisions needed to restore numbers**

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VANCOUVER, B. C. \_ Scientists gathered for a World Summit on Salmon said Wednesday that new directions and hard choices are needed to restore declining salmon populations around the world.

They suggested more money was needed to research why so many wild salmon die in the ocean and to hire marketers to spread warnings about salmon health -- warnings that scientists have issued for years without notice.

Hard choices include whether to allow some salmon stocks to go extinct so fishing can continue on healthy ones and whether to kill off seals and sea lions, which have become major salmon predators.

Arguing that the ocean accounts for a greater degree of salmon mortality than anywhere else, Carl Walters, professor of fisheries at the University of British Columbia, said the millions of dollars spent on restoring salmon habitat in rivers and streams in western Canada were wasted.

Walters cited research on 16 watersheds in western Canada that found no correlation between habitat and numbers of fish. However, he said virtually nothing is understood about why so many salmon die in the ocean, and that line of research needs money.

He added that it is time to consider killing off seals and sea lions, protected by law in the United States, to reduce the huge amount of salmon they eat. He also said trying to maintain weak stocks of salmon is making it impossible to harvest more abundant stocks.

John Fraser, chairman of Canada's Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, called on the scientists to focus on solutions rather than further document the drastic declines in fisheries around the world. Otherwise, he said, the public and elected officials will continue to ignore their warnings.

"For many years there has been a feeling of frustration among elected officials," Fraser said. "The science community has failed to articulate in a reasonable way they are able to understand the problems and solutions."

After painting a dire picture of the state of the world's fisheries, Reg Watson, senior fisheries research fellow at the University of British Columbia, suggested that scientists may need to consult marketing specialists to help them simplify their message so the public can understand it.

"It hasn't changed in years, and obviously we haven't seen the response required, so we are going to have to change," Watson said.

Watson said fisheries around the globe are declining based on a variety of measures: catch rates are declining, estimates of ocean biomass are down, fish are getting smaller, and fishermen are moving down the food chain from big predators, such as tuna and cod, to shrimp, krill and even jellyfish. The amount of fuel burned per unit of fish is rising to the point that fishing is no longer an efficient means of feeding people when measured by energy use, Watson said.

"If we can get access, we will fish there, and with no control, we will overfish there," Watson concluded. "We know what to do. We have to have the will to do it."

Jeffrey Hutchings, an evolutionary ecologist from the University of Dalhousie in Nova Scotia, said his studies of the crashes of various fisheries led him to the conclusion that the faster the decline in a particular fishery, the slower the recovery. Fish that reach maturity quickly, such as herring, can bounce back, but fish that take many years to reproduce, such as cod, are slow.

Hutchings said reducing fishing is necessary, but other factors are more important for restoration. For example, when a specific fish population gets very low, it becomes more vulnerable to predators.

•On the Net:

[www.sfu.ca/cstudies/science/summit.htm](http://www.sfu.ca/cstudies/science/summit.htm)

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