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GOV'T SUBSIDIES MAKE OCEAN "STRIP-MINING" ECONOMICALLY VIABLE: UBC RESEARCHERS

As the United Nations resume negotiations on banning bottom-trawling, researchers at the University of British Columbia demonstrate that eliminating government subsidies to dragging fleets could significantly reduce pressure on vulnerable fishery resources and ecosystems.

"At US\$152 million a year, the global amount of subsidies paid to bottom trawl fleets constitutes 15 per cent of the total value of the catch," says UBC Assoc. Prof. Rashid Sumalia, lead author of the study *Catching More Bait: A Bottom-up Re-estimation of Global Fisheries Subsidies* (available at <http://www.fisheries.ubc.ca/publications/reports/14-6.pdf>, see Chapter 3.)

"In comparison, the profit of these fleets comes to only 10 per cent of the total catch," says Sumalia, who is director of the Fisheries Economics Research Unit at the UBC Fisheries Centre. "Eliminating government subsidies renders these fleets economically inviable and as a result, relieves enormous pressure on over-fishing and vulnerable deep-sea ecosystems."

Deep-sea bottom-trawling, also known as dragging, has been described as strip-mining of the ocean floor for its destructive impacts on fisheries resources and ocean ecosystems. The practice is heavily subsidized, especially with the continued increase of fuel costs.

Sumalia and the study's co-author, world-renowned fisheries expert Daniel Pauly, analyzed global government subsidies to bottom-trawling fleets and found that without the subsidies, the practice would operate at a loss.

The UN General Assembly resumes negotiations today on a proposed moratorium on bottom-trawling on international seas, a measure the US, Australia, New Zealand and the UK are supporting. Officials from Canada's Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans have said they would oppose the ban. The negotiations are scheduled to be completed by the end of next week, and formal General Assembly action is scheduled for Dec. 7, 2006.

Many deep-sea conservation goals may be achieved by persuading governments to cease providing fuel subsidies to bottom trawling fleets, says Sumaila.

"There surely is a better way for governments to spend

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money than by increasing subsidies to a fleet that wastes fuel to maintain paltry catches of fish, from highly vulnerable stocks, while destroying their habitat in the process," adds Pauly, director of the UBC Fisheries Centre.

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