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www.intrafish.no [Published 19.10.2007 - 15:27]



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Aquaculture's growth rate actually is *declining*

John Fiorillo

At a time when global aquaculture production is soaring, the annual rate of growth actually is declining, claims new research from the University of British Columbia.



PHOTO: Kaja Baardsen

The study by graduate student Yajie Liu and associate professor Ussif Rashid Sumaila focused primarily on the growth rate of salmon farming in Norway, Chile, Scotland and Canada.

"If you look at the total volume, you see that it is increasing. But if you look the growth - the year-on-year growth rate, so you are looking at the growth rate of the growth -- then you see that it increases initially and then begins declining," Sumaila told IntraFish on Thursday. "Which is a warning to us that this growth that we see can not continue forever."

Global aquaculture is seen as the solution to the ever-shrinking production of wild-capture fisheries.

The study examined the year-on-year growth of farmed salmon production to determine whether the annual incremental growth rate of production was increasing, decreasing or stable.

It's similar to measuring the growth rate of a human's height. During the first 20 years, human height increases very rapidly, but this growth rate slows and eventually stagnates and declines over time.

The growth rate for framed salmon production in Norway peaked in 1971 and has been declining at 2.5 percent year since, Sumaila said. The same pattern is exhibited by the salmon farming industries in Chile, Canada and Scotland.

The slowing growth rate extends beyond salmon. "From 1966 to 2005, the rate of growth in production of all finfish aquaculture peaked in 1984 and has since been declining at the rate of 0.34 percent per year," he said.

Limited space for expansion, environmental problems, market influences and other factors are contributing to aquaculture's slowing growth rates, Sumaila said.

The research should serve as a cautionary note, he said, adding the idea aquaculture can meet our protein demands and we don't need wild fisheries probably is misplaced.

"In terms of policy, this says let's manage our wild stocks as best we can while we develop sustainable and sensible aquaculture to compliment," he said. "The idea that aquaculture can take over is simply a pipe dream."

The research was funded in part from grants from Aquanet, a Canadian research network, which is affiliated with The Center for Aquaculture and Environmental Research at the University of British Columbia.

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