

## Conservationists push Hong Kong fishing ban



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Conservationists called Thursday for an immediate ban on trawling to replenish Hong Kong's dwindling fish stocks and revitalise the city's heavily subsidised fishing industry.

No-catch zones and other measures could get stocks back to sustainable levels in 25 years, according to a new study carried out by Canada's University of British Columbia (UBC).

The study, commissioned by environmental group WWF's Hong Kong office, said a majority of fishermen here would trade their boats for other jobs -- although at a price -- if it meant stocks would grow again.

"It would require the loss of some fishing jobs but the result would be fewer fishermen landing larger and more valuable catches," said the UBC's Rashid Sumaila.

"Some fishing sectors would have to suffer but the rest would actually gain," Sumaila said.

The authors of the study said action was needed now as the city's fishing industry was in a state of collapse, with its 10,000 fishermen complaining their catches had deteriorated by as much as 75 percent.

Other surveys had also shown the average size of fish caught had dropped to less than 10 grams, too small for human consumption and good only for use as fish food in aquatic farms, said the WWF's Markus Shaw.

"The cost-benefit analysis justifies major investment by the government to resolve the fisheries crisis," Shaw said.

The study found that a ban on trawling, the creation of no-catch zones in worst-affected areas and a limited prawn-trawl zone could regenerate stocks.

The authors said the industry could bounce back from one that requires 278 million Hong Kong dollars (35 million US) of annual government subsidies to one that could generate 1.3-2.6 billion dollars over the next quarter century.

"We found that only half of the fishermen actually make a living from the seas, the rest do other supplementary jobs," said Sumaila.

In their research of more than 70 fishermen and people associated with the fishing trade, the authors found that a third would happily give up fishing if they were offered any compensation for their boats and equipment.

Another 40 percent would switch jobs if the price was right.

"Only a tenth of the fishermen said they would not give up their trade," said Sumaila. "If we could reduce the fleet to 10 percent, we would have no problems achieving our goal."

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