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West Coast fisheries need better management



Image: istockphoto.com/Devon Stephens

(Feb 28, 2008) World fisheries are in turmoil as populations dwindle. Even Canada's West Coast, known for its abundance of salmon and other species is experiencing a drastic decline. What can we do?

Collaboration needed

At this year's annual meeting of the [American Association for the Advancement of Science](#)

(also known as the AAAS, publishers of the well respected academic journal "Science") scientists discussed solutions and recommended integrating aquatic resources and working together.

Lack of co-ordination

That may prove difficult. For instance, off the coast of British Columbia the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Environment Canada, the provincial Ministry of Natural Resources, and several other agencies all have a role to play. Unfortunately, rather than a well-oiled set of interlocking gears making the watch tick, it looks more like a jumbled miscellaneous parts bin at a scrap yard.

New pilot project

A new federal initiative may bring all the pieces together so the clock keeps time. The [Integrated Marine Use Plan](#) is a pilot study underway for Northern British Columbia with a goal to coordinate the efforts of all the government agencies connected to waterways and fisheries. By tracking the various uses and developments in every level of government, the plan can set out clear goals for the future.

“We would like to clearly know the effects on habitat or fish, social and economic issues as well as biological,” said Russ Jones from the Haida First Nation, “So, we look at all those factors and address marine use or spatial planning use. In some areas certain uses will be allowed here but not there, others will allow multiple uses, and some areas will have strictly no use.”

Joining different organizations

The Haida First Nation is just one of many stakeholders invited to be part of the integrated plan. Several non-governmental organizations are also involved, such as the Living Ocean Society, the David Suzuki Foundation and WWF Canada.

“The main goals are marine conservation and protecting biodiversity, recognizing that without this approach the oceans can become degraded and depleted,” said Jones.

Originally proposed a decade ago, the hope was to establish a network of marine protected environments by 2010.

Important improvements[Daniel Pauly](#)

believes that’s progress. Pauly is one the world’s most respected ocean scientists and a researcher at the University of British Columbia, who tracks hundreds of fisheries worldwide using special software he has developed over decades. This overview knowledge of the world’s fisheries has led him to speak out about the mismanagement of fisheries.

“With growth of population, democracies need constant renegotiation of social contracts,” said Pauly, who spoke at the AAAS conference in Boston. “Factories became liable for keeping the water and air clean and their workers healthy. We need to be asking the same question about fisheries.”

NGOs part of the solution

Pauly has found that NGOs often protect the commons and represent citizens better than industry or the government agencies supposed to regulate industry. Thus, the inclusion of NGOs in the decision-making process is a major step forward in the renegotiating of social contracts.

“I strongly believe that the right to fish is an absurdity like the right to pollute,” said Pauly. “An activity that is detrimental to ecosystems can only be a limited privilege as long as you don’t destroy it.”

We may be in the middle of a storm but efforts are being made to guide us out of the rough waters and into a calmer and better managed ocean.

Graeme Stemp-Morlock is a freelance science and environment writer based in Waterloo, Ontario.

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