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News Editor David Braun's eye on the world

NatGeo News Watch

World Governments Subsidize the Wrong Fisheries, Survey Suggests

Posted on August 26, 2008 in [Environment](#) | [0 Comments](#)Tags: [fish](#) [fishing](#) [food](#) [ocean](#)

Small-scale fisheries produce as much annual catch for human consumption and use less than one-eighth the fuel as their industrial counterparts. They discard comparatively little bycatch and are far less destructive to deep-sea environments. They employ many more people.

"They are our best hope at sustainable fisheries," says Daniel Pauly, director of the [University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre](#) and co-author of a study published in the current issue of the journal *Conservation Biology*.

Then why is it that small-scale fisheries (characterized by UBC as fishers operating in boats 50 feet or shorter) receive at most only 20 percent of the world's total government fishery subsidies?

Photo Dean Conger/NGS

The UBC study compared the amount of subsidies large-scale, industrial fisheries receive versus small-scale, coastal fisheries. The average large-scale fisherman receives nearly

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As head of National Geographic's daily online news service, David Braun has a front-row seat on developments in the fields of science, nature, and cultures. This blog will give you David's unique perspective on the news, including access to some of the interesting stories that don't make it onto the news site, behind-the-scenes details about

life in the National Geographic newsroom, and David's insights into what's changing in our world, why, and what we can do about it.

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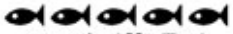







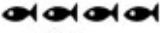


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200 times the fuel subsidy that the average small-scale fisherman receives, the survey found.

"This is because small scale fisheries employ more than 12 million people worldwide, compared to half a million in the industrial sector," says Jennifer Jacquet, study co-author and a PhD Candidate in the UBC Fisheries Centre. "And because small-scale fisheries use less fuel to catch fish."

FISHERY	LARGE SCALE 	SMALL SCALE 
BENEFITS		
Subsidies	\$\$\$\$\$ 25-27 billion	\$ 5-7 billion
Number of fishers employed	 about 1/2 million	 over 12 million
Annual catch for human consumption	 about 30 million t	 same: about 30 million t
Annual catch reduced to fishmeal and oils	 35 million t	 Almost none
Annual fuel oil consumption	 about 37 million t	 about 5 million t
Catch per tonne of fuel consumed	 =  1-2 t	 =  4-8 t
Fish and other sealife discarded at sea	 8-20 million tonnes	 Very little

Graphic courtesy UBC

"Small-scale fisheries use fishing gear that are more selective and far less destructive to deep sea environments," Jacquet added. "As a result they discard very little unwanted fish and almost all of their catch is used for human consumption."

Large-scale fisheries, on the other hand, typically do not target species for direct human consumption and discard an estimated 10-22 million tons of unwanted dead fish each year and reduces another 42 million tons of their annual catch to fishmeal.

The study authors point out that over the past decade, market-based sustainable seafood

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initiatives such as eco-labeling have been the predominant strategy for curtailing demand of dwindling fish stocks. But it hasn't worked, they say.

"The U.S. conservation community alone invested \$37 million between 1999 to 2004 to promote certification and "wallet cards" to encourage consumers to purchase seafood caught using sustainable practices.

"For the amount of resources invested, we haven't seen significant decrease in demand for species for which the global stocks are on the edge of collapse," says Pauly.

"Market-based initiatives, while well-intentioned, unduly discriminate against small scale fishers for their lack of resources to provide data for certification."

Furthermore, small fishers simply can't compete on the open market with large fleets. Rashid Sumaila, also of the UBC Fisheries Centre, estimates that governments worldwide subsidize \$30-34 billion a year in fishing operations, of which \$25-27 billion go to large-scale fleets.

"It's an unfair disadvantage that in any other industry would have had people up in arms," says Jacquet. "But small-scale fishers are often in developing countries and have very little political influence."

Pauly and Jaquet say eliminating government subsidies is the most effective strategy towards significantly reducing pressure on vulnerable global fish stocks.

"Without subsidies, most large-scale fishing operations will be economically unviable," says Jacquet. "Small scale fishers will have a better chance of thriving in local markets, and global fish stocks will have an opportunity to rebound."

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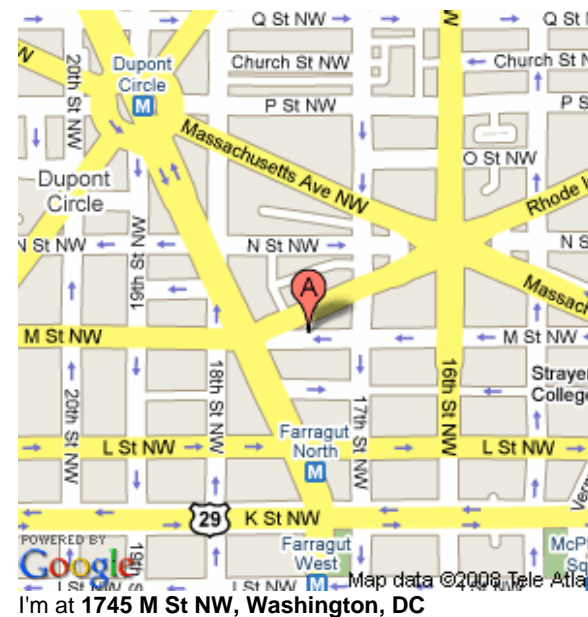
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