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New Study: Ocean Over-fishing has Reached a Crisis

October 31, 2008

Vancouver, BC – The oceans are being stripped of a major food source – not only for oceangoing fish and birds, but for people - according to a nine-year study from the University of British Columbia (UBC). It calls the trend "alarming," that more than one-third of the fish caught in the oceans end up being processed as animal feed.

Dr. Ellen Pikitch, executive director, *Institute for Ocean Conservation Science*, says the small forage fish, such as sardines and anchovies, are used to feed poultry, pigs and even other fish raised in hatcheries. She contends it's a wasteful use of a finite resource.

"On average, it takes about three to five pounds of fishmeal to create one pound of farmed salmon. So, you're basically turning three to five pounds of fish into one pound - and that's a net ecological loss."

The report says chickens and pigs eat six times more fish than most Americans, and suggests that soy and other crops could be used instead. Pikitch says other products made from forage fish are fertilizers, and the fish oil capsules that doctors recommend for getting more Omega-3 fatty acids in your diet.

"The fish eat algae, and the algae are the ones that are actually producing the Omega-3 fatty acids directly. There are some companies that are starting to produce the equivalent of fish oil capsules, without using the fish."

Pikitch chairs a new task force of scientists working to come up with plans by 2010 to manage the forage fish harvest without depleting the oceans. Companies that catch forage fish say they're plentiful, cheap and good sources of protein for animals.

The study, funded in part by the *Pew Institute for Ocean Science*, will be published in the November issue of the *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*. "Forage Fish: From Ecosystems to Markets," will also be posted on the Web site of the UBC project, at www.seaaroundus.org.

Chris Thomas, Public News Service - WA

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