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SeaFood Business

October 29, 2008 - A study funded by Pew Charitable Trusts says forage fisheries harvested for fishmeal and livestock feed should instead be used to feed humans.

The demand for fishmeal and fish oil by the livestock and aquaculture industries, the study says, disregards a serious global overfishing crisis. Forage fish species include anchovies, menhaden, sardines and other small- to medium-sized fish.

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"Forage Fish: From Ecosystems to Markets," is a product of the nine-year Sea Around Us Project, a partnership between the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and The Pew Charitable Trusts. It will appear in the Annual Review of Environment and Resources, scheduled for publication in November.

"We need to stop using so many small ocean fish to feed farmed fish and other animals," says lead author Dr. Jacqueline Alder. "These small, tasty fish could instead feed people. Society should demand that we

stop wasting these fish on farmed fish, pigs and poultry."

Alder, senior author Dr. Daniel Pauly and colleagues contend that fishmeal and fish oil have skyrocketed in popularity because forage fish are easy to catch in large numbers, and hence, relatively inexpensive. They say that more than one-third of the world's marine fish catches are forage fisheries, 90 percent of which are used for animal feed.

The Sea Around Us Project has been primarily funded by the Pew Institute for Ocean Science, which is now transitioning to become the Institute for Ocean Conservation Science at Stony Brook University.

"It defies reason to drain the ocean of small, wild fishes that could be directly consumed by people in

order to produce a lesser quantity of farmed fish," says Dr. Ellen K. Pikitch, executive director of the Institute for Ocean Conservation Science and a Professor at Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences. "Skyrocketing pressure on small wild fishes may be putting entire marine food webs at great risk."

The most intensive commercial use of forage fish is for farmed-animal feed, but there is also a growing demand for human fish oil supplements. Species include the Peruvian and European anchovy, capelin, Japanese pilchard, round sardinella and European anchovy.

"The use of forage fish for animal husbandry competes directly with human consumption in some areas of the world," the authors write.

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