

Our oceans overfished to feed the pigs

ROSSLYN BEEBY

25/10/2008 4:00:00 AM

Factory-farmed fish, pigs and poultry are consuming 28 million tonnes of fish a year, or roughly six times the amount of seafood eaten by Americans, according to new research.

A nine-year study by the University of British Columbia has found that 90 per cent of small fish caught in the world's oceans every year such as anchovies, sardines and mackerel are processed to make fishmeal and fish oil.

They are used as a cheap feed for aquaculture (including farmed Atlantic salmon, prawns and trout), poultry, pigs and animals bred for the fur industry.

The study's findings, to be published next month, warn this use is unsustainable, given current rates of global overfishing and increasing threats to global food security.

University of Columbia senior researcher Jacqueline Alder said: "Society should demand that we stop wasting these fish on farmed fish, pigs, and poultry.

"Although feeds derived from soy and other land-based crops are available and are used, fishmeal and fish oil have skyrocketed in popularity because forage fish are easy to catch in large numbers and, hence, relatively inexpensive."

Dr Alder, who was previously a researcher at James Cook University in Townsville, warns that the excessive harvesting of forage fish is "squandering a precious food resource for humans and disregarding the serious overfishing crisis in our oceans".

According to the study, small forage fish account for 37pc, or 31.5 million tonnes, of all fish taken from the world's oceans each year.

Of this amount, 90pc is processed into fishmeal and fish oil.

Current figures show 46pc of fishmeal and fish oil is used as feed for aquaculture, 24 per cent for pig feed and 22pc for poultry.

The study estimates that pigs and poultry around the world consume more than twice as much seafood as the Japanese eat.

The farmyard animals eat more than six times the amount consumed in the United States.

Fisheries targeting forage fish are concentrated in four areas of the world the western coast of South America, northern Europe, the Atlantic seaboard of the US, and Alaska.

Scientists have raised concerns that a 50pc increase in global aquaculture in the past 10 years will seriously affect marine ecosystems already under threat from acidification of the oceans caused by climate change.

Species dependent on forage fish include penguins, gulls, cormorants, puffins, dolphins and right whales.

The study says little is known about the role of forage fish in marine ecosystems and few management plans exist for sustainable fishing of these key marine food-web species.

Neither are there plans to deal with a growing global human demand for fish-oil supplements, thought to reduce the risk of dementia.

The US-based Pew Institute for Ocean Science Institute, which funded the research, plans to set up a global taskforce of leading scientists and fisheries policy experts to find new ways of making forage fisheries more sustainable.

The institute's executive director, Dr Ellen Pikitch, said: "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."

The Canberra Times

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With over 6.5 billion people on the planet, relying on livestock sources is unrealistic and a wasteful. It should be apparent that eating on top of the food chain is totally inefficient. If more people were encouraged to take up a plant-based diet, even just to help the planet, then our oceans and rainforest areas could be less stressed. All nutrients can be found in plants and it is healthier than meat-dairy based diets.

Posted by **vegan** on 27/10/2008 3:39:07 AM

The diversion of fish stock to feed other animals is not dissimilar to the diversion of grain to feed cattle. In both cases animals are being force-fed with a diet that is unnatural and unsustainable. The cost and availability of food is distorted not by the increased use of grain-feed biofuels where

sun-energy in plants is converted to fuel for vehicles, but by food waste, diversion of food to unnatural uses, food transport costs and the packaging and advertising that is wrapped around food.

Posted by **Mangiri** on 27/10/2008 9:01:02 AM

yes fish meal is used in animal feeds, but not just for pigs and poultry, also I believe in dog biscuits. Fish products are also used in fertilizers that the ordinary household puts on the garden, their precious pot plants, their fruit trees and any thing else they care to use it for. There is also a lot of wastage amongst the human populations. There is plenty of room to farm fish just like farming cows, sheep and pigs and poultry. we should do more farming and then there would be less taking from our oceans. We have the technology to do exactly this, so the educated group of people should spend more time developing and less time criticizing and the world would be a better place.

Posted by **blonde** on 27/10/2008 9:04:13 AM

Growing food to feed animals to then feed humans is an enormously inefficient waste of our precious resources, plus causes major unnecessary damage to our marine and land environments. We can choose to produce and consume less harmfully. Time for our governments to step in and stop or at least reduce this greed-driven destruction.

Posted by **Food4thought** on 27/10/2008 10:32:44 AM

Cattle, pigs, chickens if given the chance would graze/forage, fertilize and move on - that is their role in the grand scheme of things. They would not choose a seafood diet so don't blame these animals for the controlled diets they are given in their controlled prisons. With regard to Australia's Atlantic Salmon - have you smelt the stuff and then smelt wild caught salmon. It is nauseating in comparison. All that effort, all that waste for a poor quality meal. Time to let the original blueprint for life on earth, evolved over millenia, return.

Posted by **deb** on 27/10/2008 3:15:15 PM

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