

Fish being wiped out to feed farm animals, study says

Wednesday, November 18th, 2009 | 6:10 am

Canwest News Service

The oceans are being emptied to provide feed for farmed animals such as fish, chickens and pigs, a study involving the University of B.C. concludes.

The study, published this week in *Oryx: the International Journal of Conservation*, finds that 30 million tonnes or 36 per cent of the world's total fisheries catch each year is ground up into fishmeal and oil to feed farmed animals.

The study notes pigs and chickens consume six and two times the amount of seafood as U.S. and Japanese consumers, respectively.

In Peru, the anchovy fishery produces half of the world fishmeal based on annual catches of five to 10 million tonnes, while 15 million people — half the country's population — live in poverty and 25 per cent of infants are malnourished.

Finding alternative sources for the production of animal feed should be a priority, the study said. Fisheries that supply the fishmeal industry instead of feeding people should not receive an eco-label of sustainability.

Protein alternatives for animal feed could potentially include soymeal as well as meals made from mass-producing insects, the study noted.

The study's lead author, Jennifer Jacquet, a post-doctoral fellow at UBC's Fisheries Centre, said in an interview Tuesday the B.C. salmon farming industry is a major consumer of wild fish stocks.

She doesn't see that changing because salmon — unlike chickens — are carnivores and unlikely to adapt to a herbivorous diet. Oyster and mussel farming is a better alternative, she said.

Mary Ellen Walling, executive director of the B.C. Salmon Farmers Association, deferred response to the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance, but no one there could immediately be reached.

Garnet Etsell, a poultry producer and chair of the B.C. Agriculture Council, said he believes fishmeal and fish oil comprise only a small portion of poultry feed. He noted fish are added as a source of protein, just as bugs and worms would be consumed by wild chickens.

In the *Oryx* article, nine fisheries and conservation researchers, including four from UBC, also reviewed the effectiveness of conservation campaigns.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium has distributed more than one million seafood wallet cards advising consumers on sustainable seafood, but has found no overall change in the market. Fishing pressures have not decreased for targeted species.

Only about one per cent of fish sales are certified as sustainable by the London-based Marine Stewardship Council, which recently certified B.C.'s halibut and hake fisheries.

"Working with household consumers alone cannot save fish," the study concludes.

The *Oryx* study suggests campaigns targeting large supermarket chains would have more effect, noting more than 60 per cent of seafood in Canada and half the seafood in the U.S. is sold through supermarkets.

The authors also suggest establishing international standards for labelling sustainable seafood and eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies.

The study says that in general eco-labels "appear to be weak instruments for conservation and consumer campaigns do not seem effective at reducing demand or fishing pressure."

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