

# Fisheries management shrouded in secrecy, corrupted by politics: study

By Alison Auld – 1 day ago

HALIFAX, N.S. — Fisheries management in most of the world's coastal states is shrouded in secrecy and corrupted by political pressures, according to a new study that says stock survival hinges on more transparent conservation efforts.

The international team of scientists found that only seven per cent of countries bordering water conduct rigorous scientific assessments in drafting their fisheries policies.

The research, to be published Tuesday in the journal PLoS Biology, also found that just over one per cent of the countries have an open process of incorporating scientific advice in their fisheries policies.

Camilo Mora, the paper's lead author and a marine biologist at Dalhousie University in Halifax, said the team also determined that countries with the most transparent and science-based management plans had the healthiest stocks.

"The management of the world's fisheries is in a very sad state of affairs," he said.

"The transparency to which a country incorporates its science into policy determined the extent to which the fishery was going to be sustainable or not."

Canada ranked in the middle of the pack compared to all other countries involved in the fishery.

While it has good scientific data on stocks, Mora said policy makers got low marks for allowing too much fishing, not doing enough to conserve dwindling stocks and not being open enough in drafting fisheries policies.

They also found that heavy subsidies in Canadian fisheries contributed to excessive fishing efforts.

The process of setting quotas and issuing licences is also tainted by politics, the paper claims, with industry pressuring government.

"Policy-making is at the centre of the entire process of fisheries management," said Marta Coll, a scientist based in Spain who co-wrote the report.

"If this is heavily influenced by political pressures or corruption, it's unlikely that good scientific advice will ever be translated into proper regulations."

The researchers cited the state of the bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean, which has been decimated by intense fishing pressures.

Scientists there recommended a catch of 15,000 tonnes, but saw policy makers grant a quota of 22,000 as a result of industry pressures.

Mora said the team based their evaluation on six different factors, including the transparency of policy making, enforcement, subsidies, fishing effort and foreign fishing. They received data from more than 1,200 fisheries experts.

The small Faroe Islands northwest of Scotland and the Falkland Islands off Argentina had the best overall rankings, while African and South Pacific countries had some of the worst.

About one-third of the poorest coastal countries were also found to be selling their fishing rights to developed nations, like the United States, China, the European Union and Russia.

Richer nations pursue fish further from domestic waters once they have depleted their own stocks, the authors said, leading them to impoverished coastal countries.

"For developing nations the situation is more regrettable given that many of these countries face shortages in food supply," said co-author Rashid Sumaila of the University of British Columbia.

Many poorer countries were also found to have poor science and enforcement, while wealthier states had strong fisheries data and policing capabilities.

The researchers said the bulk of countries are failing to live up to international standards that promote improved fisheries management, like the UN Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which are non-binding.

A report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said 28 per cent of the world's stocks are being overexploited or have collapsed, while more than half are fully exploited.

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