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Food + Farming

Sustainable shopping won't save the oceans: study

By Colleen Kimmett November 17, 2009 03:23 pm

People who follow sustainable seafood guidelines might be sabotaging their efforts by eating chicken or pork, according to a new study co-authored by four fisheries researchers at the University of British Columbia.

The [study](#), published this week in *Oryx*, the International Journal of Conservation, notes that 36 per cent of the world's total fisheries catch is ground into feed for farmed animals -- and found that consumer-driven efforts to create demand for sustainable seafood are having little impact.

"Ultimately these farm animals have a greater impact on our seafood supplies than the most successful seafood certification program," said lead author Jennifer Jaquet.

The study also pointed to research from the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which found that global demand for seafood continues to grow despite widespread consumer campaigns that encourage sustainable seafood choices.

"Those campaigns on a small scale and perhaps a local level can demonstrate changes," said Jacquet. "We looked at what kinds of numbers are coming back from demand and consumption globally. We found consumer efforts aren't having an effect on that scale."

Jacquet said of the 30 million tonnes of fish caught each year for animal feed, approximately half goes to pork and chicken production and half goes to farmed fish production.

Last summer, Greenpeace mounted a [coast-to-coast campaign](#) to embarrass supermarkets stocking endangered or red-listed species. As a result, chains like Loblaws, Metro and Overwaitea are taking steps to create sustainable seafood policies.

Ultimately, said Jacquet, a lack of labeling and inspection regulations for seafood in Canada means that consumers can't always make an informed decision anyway.

"People need to disengage as consumers and re-engage in a new way," she said. "If you only have five minutes a day for environmental issues, don't worry about it in terms of what you are going to buy, worry about it in terms of making a phone call to your Trader Joe's...or making a phone call to your representative."

Colleen Kimmitt reports for The Tyee.

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