

China Tops Seafood Consumption Study

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Sept. 24 – China has overtaken Japan in another category, this time as the world’s leading consumer of seafood, according to a National Geographic study that uses a new model to gauge the impact of consumption on fisheries.

By studying the “seafood print,” researchers were able to gauge each country’s impact on the world’s fisheries based not only on how many fish were caught and consumed, but also on what type of fish were caught and consumed.

“A pound of tuna represents roughly a hundred times the footprint of a pound of sardines,” explains Daniel Pauly, the University of British Columbia Fisheries Center professor who conducted the study. The study emphasizes the fact that “every fish is different.”

“Anchovies are different from tuna in the same way that gazelles are different from lions (or rather field mice from lion-eating dragons, to account for the size difference),” Pauly said in an email to The Washington Post. “This should make obvious how illusory it is to think that the consumption of tuna by lots of people can ever be ‘sustainable.’”

Using this method, the study estimates China’s “seafood print” at roughly 694 million metric tons each year. Japan’s consumption levels are the world’s second highest at 582 million metric tons and the United States is third, consuming about 385 million metric tons of the ocean’s resources every year.

Japan was previously considered the top consumer of seafood mainly because of the country’s preference for fish like tuna and salmon, which are at the top of the food chain, while China tends to consume less high-value fish, the study said.

“Though the average Chinese consumer generally eats smaller fish than the average Japanese consumer does, China’s massive population gives it the world’s biggest seafood print,” National Geographic said.

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