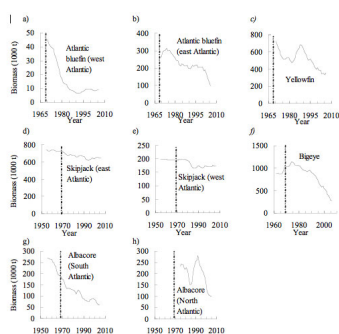


Most species under the management of the world's 18 regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) are declining in biomass. These organisations have failed the high seas, said Sarika Cullis-Suzuki of the University of British Columbia, Canada.



Ms Cullis-Suzuki and co-worker Dr Daniel Pauly studied RFMO performance on paper and, for 48 stocks, performance in practice. They found that the establishment of these organisations has not prevented the decline, in some cases severe, of open water species such as whale and tuna.

They examined the organisations' various instruments and conventions which were measured against published best practice guidelines. Current fish stocks and historical data were analysed to determine performance against maximum sustainable yield indicators.



Example of historical biomass results for eight tuna stocks under ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) management; dashed lines denote year of RFMO establishment, 1964.

On paper, while many RFMOs performed well in their understanding of the importance of science for management, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing was a topic generally inadequately addressed. There was a distinct disparity for most RFMOs between their stated goals and their performance in practice.

“Objectives appear quite uniform across RFMOs, each emphasising a commitment to the conservation of their stocks,” said Ms Cullis-Suzuki. “However, still a global commons to most, the high seas undergo widespread and rampant illegal fishing with next to no consequence, a crisis further compounded by the immensity and unmonitored state of the area.”

Nealy 60 percent of the oceans are outside national jurisdiction and managed by RFMOs. Still relatively pristine compared to coastal areas, there is still time to turn around the worrying trends, said Ms Cullis-Suzuki.

“This can only happen if RFMOs actually act as stewards of the high seas and become accountable for their actions.”

Wendy Laursen