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### Fish farming will not feed the world, says top expert

China's distorted farmed fish figures

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Charles Clover Jan 31st 2010

The assumption that fish from farms can feed the world as catches of wild fish decline is “a fiction” and based on official figures now known to be suspect, Dr Daniel Pauly, a leading scientist said yesterday.

Dr Pauly said official UN figures showed farmed fish account for nearly half of all fish consumed by humans were “wildly distorted” and inflated by over-reporting by China, the world’s largest producer of farmed fish.

Speaking at the Seafood Summit in Paris, he said: “It is a fiction, based on statistics that the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation doesn’t believe itself. “



It was Dr Pauly who proved in 2001 that wild fish catches were in decline by exposing the fact that Chinese reporting of wild fish catches bore little relationship to reality.

He found that Communist officials had an inbuilt incentive to exaggerate catches in order to get promoted.

The figures had been exaggerated so much that they had hidden the fact that world catches of fish had been in decline since 1989.

This time Dr Pauly turned his guns on the official figures for aquaculture and said that these are just as likely to be wrong because “the incentive to over-report is still there.”

The UN FAO’s State of Fisheries and Aquaculture report, published last year, carries a throwaway line that “capture fisheries and aquaculture production statistics for China may be too high.”

Dr Pauly said that the growth of fish farming in other parts of the world were in single figures whereas the Chinese claimed growth rates of 20 per cent were not credible, given that the growth of China’s energy supply was only 5 per cent per year.

The growth put the claims of rapid growth by the aquaculture industry into context, said Dr Pauly.

“Seafood and aquaculture are not going to feed the world,” he said. That would be done by increasing production of grains, such as rice.

Most demand for seafood was satisfied by taking fish from the poor world under unfair agreements and selling it in the rich world, thereby making the poor world poorer and less well-nourished.

Dr Pauly, also said official aquaculture figures contained a massive amount of double counting. Roughly a third of all fish caught are small fish that are ground up to make fish pellets for fish farms.

“If you feed the world with salmon, you cannot feed the world with the anchovies you feed to the salmon,” he said.

He said that the amount of fish fed to feed other fish, pigs and chickens, was “a tremendous waste of good food.”

When he worked in Peru in the 1980s he was told that you could not eat the Peruvian anchovies caught by the millions of tons off the coast for use in fishmeal. He found that anchovies were not prized because they were fed to prisoners. There is now a local campaign to eat the anchovies, not farmed salmon.

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