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Industrial fishing is doomed, says top academic

Daniel Pauly speaks at Paris Seafood Summit

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Paul Eccleston Jan 31st 2010



Dr Daniel Pauly. Picture:
Shermani

One of the world's top fisheries scientists has launched a blistering attack on industrialised fishing.

Dr Daniel Pauly said current methods of catching fish on a massive scale were unsustainable, wasteful, inefficient and were doomed to fail.

He told the [Seafood Summit](#) conference in Paris that subsidised and expensive trawling fleets would vanish within 20 years because of spiralling fuel costs.

Dr Pauly of the university of British Columbia and founder of the academic study group [The Seas Around Us](#), said the future lay with small, sustainable and carefully managed coastal fisheries that were capable of supplying everybody's needs.

"Small scale works. Small fisheries are compatible with sustainability whereas industrial fisheries have got us into the mess we are now in with over-capitalised, subsidy-ridden and fuel-guzzling trawlers," he told 600 delegates at the conference.

"The demise of industrialised fishing due to high fuel costs will allow a renaissance of coastal fisheries. They can be sustainable and generate healthy food and we would eat only fish from stocks that have been rebuilt and cared for.

"We could pay for the occasional 'good fish' imported from developing countries instead of gorging on cheap fish ripped off from the coasts of these developing countries through access agreements."

Dr Pauly said despite ever more sophisticated technology on fishing boats, fish landings had been in decline since 2001 and instead of living off the interest of fish stocks we had instead been using the capital.

As stocks declined in their own waters, the big fishing nations had spread their nets further afield so that Spanish boats, for instance, now hunted in the Indian and Pacific oceans. And instead of traditional species such as cod and herring they now fished much deeper searching for other species.

The damage to the sea bed caused by shrimp trawlers off the Texan coast in the Gulf of Mexico, could be seen from space.

But these methods, so called 'sustainable trawling' had in fact been shown to be unsustainable reducing waters once rich in marine life to a "mud soup" which produced only jellyfish.

"Trawling depends on cheap oil but the era of cheap oil is over. Fuel is going to be very expensive in the future and we won't be able to use trawlers in 20 years because they depend on subsidies and use more fuel than they catch in volume of fish," he said.

"If we are going to deal with global warming we will have to pay more for fuel – and that is the Achilles heel of trawling."

Dr Pauly said we were already seeing the consequences of global warming in our oceans with fish on the move from traditional temperate and cold waters towards the Poles. Giant squid once found in the waters off Mexico were now turning up thousands of miles north in British Columbia. Arctic fish would eventually disappear in the same way that the North Sea cod was now locally extinct.

He told an audience of marine protection groups, scientists and academics that aquaculture – farming fish for food – would not work because using fish to feed other fish was unsustainable and ethically wrong because it should be used to feed hungry people. One third of all caught fish was

Anchovies, the main ingredient of fishmeal, had once been spurned by the people of Peru because it was considered to be fit only for feeding prisoners. But perceptions and attitudes were changing and where once only one per cent of the rich Peruvian anchovy catch was eaten by people it was now between three and four per cent and still rising.

Dr Pauly also attacked the idea of fish being a 'healthy' food that everybody had to eat and said this just another food 'fad' as with spinach in the 1950s and fibre in the 1980s.

"The craze for fish as a healthy food will pass. Europe at the moment imports 80 per cent of its fish to meet the demand and this is not sustainable. We already have enough protein from animals and we just don't need to eat this fish," he said.

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