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Fish retailer in Beijing. (Photo: Terje Engoe)

China top in world seafood consumption: study

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A new model to measure fisheries has shown that China has overtaken Japan to lead the world in seafood consumption, researchers said.

American and Canadian marine scientists compared the resources needed by different kinds of fish to the total consumption of all seafoods worldwide, finding that China, Japan and the United States were the top three seafood-eating nations.

The report headed by Daniel Pauly, director of the Fisheries Centre at the University of British Columbia, warned on Wednesday that global fisheries are increasingly unsustainable and their products are unequally consumed by wealthy countries.

Daniel Pauly (Photo: Seafood Choices Alliance)

Japan was previously considered the top seafood-consuming nation, mainly because China consumes less high-value fish like tuna or salmon, said the study.

But when total resources needed to produce seafood are tallied, the study showed the Asian giant at the top of the ocean food chain.

"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, 694 million metric tonnes of primary production," said National Geographic, which co- funded the research.

Pauly's team developed a measuring tool called "SeafoodPrint" modeled on the "ecological footprint" concept that measures the area of land needed to sustain a person depending on their location and lifestyle.

The researchers' model compares fish by the amount of algae it takes to produce them, said study co-author and PhD economics student Wilf Swartz.

"By expressing everything in terms of kilograms of algae...we can measure how much of the ocean's production is being consumed by humans," Swartz told *AFP*. "A kilogram of herring would be the equivalent of 100 kilograms of algae, and one kilogram of tuna would be equivalent to 1,000 kilograms of algae."

The measurement gives regulators a means to measure the total human impact on the

oceans, and the report hopes to encourage consumers to eat species with a less harmful impact.

"Hopefully we can change the demands on fish such as salmon, to less impactful species, like mackerel," said Swartz.

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