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Study: Arctic fish catches under-reported

Text

VANCOUVER, British Columbia, Feb. 4 (UPI) -- Canadian researchers say actual fishery catches in the arctic in the last 50 years were almost 75 times the amounts reported to authorities.

Scientists at the University of British Columbia estimate 950,000 tons were caught from 1950 to 2006, far above what was reported to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization during this period, a university release said.

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The research team reconstructed fisheries catch data from various sources for the FAO's Fisheries Statistical Area 18, which covers arctic coastal areas in northern Siberia, Alaska and Canada.

"Ineffective reporting, due to governance issues and a lack of credible data on small-scale fisheries, has given us a false sense of comfort that the arctic is still a pristine frontier when it comes to fisheries," Dirk Zeller at UBC's Fisheries Center says. "We now offer a more accurate baseline against which we can monitor changes in fish catches and to inform policy and conservation efforts.

"Conservation efforts in the arctic have so far focused on the exploitation of marine mammals -- seals and polar bears are frankly easy on the eye and plain to see," Zeller says. "None of them would survive, however, if we allow over-exploitation of fish in this delicate but so-far neglected ecosystem."

