Lifestyle - SciTech

Print

Eat prey, not hunters to save fish stock: Experts

Consuming more of the fish at the top of the food chain can harm marine ecosystem, says fisheries scientist

Posted On Tuesday, February 22, 2011

Cut back on tuna and salmon and load your plate with herring, sardines and anchovies (pictured) if you want to help save the world's fish, a Canadian scientist has said.

The study by Villy Christensen of the University of British Columbia's Fisheries Centre confirmed some previous indications that populations of predator fish at the top of the food chain, such as cod, tuna and groupers, have shrunk by around two-thirds in the past 100 years. More than half that decline occurred in the past 40 years, reports The Guardian.

Christensen found the stock of 'forage fish', such as sardines, anchovy and capelin, has more than doubled over the past century. These are fish that are normally eaten by the top predators. "You remove the predator, you get more prey fish," said Christensen. "That has not been demonstrated before because people don't measure the number, they don't go out and count them."

His call for consumers to shift their attention down the marine food chain from predators like tuna and cod to more unusual fish echoes that by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, who suggests we should eat more coley, mackerel, dab, pouting, herring and sardines.

"I know you like your fish suppers, but our appetite for the same fish, day in, day out, is sucking the seas dry," Oliver has said. "I wouldn't bother waiting for the politicians to sort this one out, guys, you can really help from the comfort of your own kitchen... Lay off the cod, haddock and tuna, diversify and cook up a wider range of fish."

In their analysis, Christensen's team collated data from more than 200 models of marine ecosystems around the world, using a technique called Ecopath, to estimate the mass of various fish in the world's oceans and how it has changed from 1880 to 2007. Christensen presented his findings on Friday at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in Washington, DC.

Numbers Speak

The precipitous drop in top predator fish was also linked, in a separate study presented at the AAAS, to the rise in global fishing capacity.

This has increased by 54 per cent from 1950 to 2010 with no sign of a decrease in recent years.