

'Wild' ocean is at risk from overfishing

BY BRADLEY BOUZANE, POSTMEDIA NEWS FEBRUARY 19, 2011

The overfishing of cod, tuna and other predatory fish has led to a sizable increase in smaller fish that could eliminate the concept of "wild" oceans, turning them into massive farms for aquaculture feed, a team of B.C. scientists warn.

The group from the University of British Columbia's Fisheries Centre said the predatory fish population has dropped by about two-thirds over the past century, while "forage" fish, such as capelin, sardine and anchovy have increased their stocks by more than 100 per cent.

The researchers call the process "fishing down the food-web," and say it could change the face of the world's oceans, in short order.

"Overfishing has absolutely had a 'when cats are away, the mice will play' effect on our oceans," lead researcher Prof. Villy Christensen said in a statement. "By removing the large, predatory species from the ocean, small forage fish have been left to thrive.

"Currently, forage fish are turned into fish meal and fish oil and used as feeds for the aquaculture industry ... If the fishing-down-the-foodweb trend continues, our oceans may one day become a farm to produce feeds for the aquaculture industry."

Led by Christensen, a team of scientists used more than 200 marine ecosystem models from around the world and extracted more than 68,000 estimates of fish biomass from 1880 to 2007.

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