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Why tiddlers may

soon rule our oceans

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By John Von Radowitz

Careless fishing and fussy consumers threaten to leave the oceans teeming with tiddlers but emptied of big predators, research has suggested.

In the past 100 years, numbers of species such as cod, tuna, grouper and swordfish have fallen by two-thirds. Meanwhile, populations of sardines, anchovies, sprats and other small "grazers" have more than doubled.

Only a minority of the smaller fish are used for human consumption. The vast majority are turned into food products for fish farms. If the trend continues, it could mean the end of the "wild" ocean, said Professor Villy Christensen, who led the study.

With few predators left, its main purpose would be to serve the fish-farming industry. But even this could be undermined by upsetting the delicate balance between prey and predator. "When you remove the predator, you get more prey," said Prof Christensen, from the University of British Columbia in Canada. "We're losing the big fish and getting the Serengeti without the lions."

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