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LOCAL NEWS

## Flirting with fishing disaster

Dr. Daniel Pauly shares his views on our diminishing oceans in BAG talk Ben Lypka

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The human race and world fisheries are fighting a war that the fish have no chance of winning, according to Dr. Daniel Pauly, who was a guest lecturer at the Brackendale Art Gallery (BAG) on Sunday (Jan. 23).

Pauly, who was in town as part of the BAG's Natural World Speaker Series, painted a bleak picture of the state of today's oceans.

"Fisheries remove life from the ocean," he said. "But they remove so much of it that the abundant species are gone. You stock so much technology in your boats that it is almost like a tank. It is almost as if we use our military to try and fight a war with the fish. And we're winning."

Pauly touched on a number of subjects and began by looking at the loss of cod on the Canada's Atlantic coast.

"Essentially cod is gone," he said. "And the question is whether this story is typical or an exception. But what I have learned through working with my colleagues — we changed the debate to 'This is only one case of many and fisheries as an industry works like this.'"

Pauly pointed to the move from lines and dories used by small fishing fleets to trawlers back in the 1950s as being a main reason for the disappearance of the cod.

"We expanded more and got to the point where we cannot expand anymore," he said of the situation on Canada's East coast. "The catch continued to decline and Canada is now an importer of fish and no longer an exporter."

He said that fisheries as a whole continues to expand to the south, which is where we get most of our fish from today. He added that he thinks we will continue to go south until we cannot go further. The problem is that fish will continue to decline as we go further and further south.

"The fisheries industry has never been sustainable," he said. "It's like a Ponzi scheme. We always eat up the capital and leave nothing similar to interest to help fish grow. It's very similar to the problems in the U.S. with banks."

Pauly explained the concept of fishing down, whereby humans generally go after the bigger fish first, such as cod, while disrupting the entire ecosystem at the same time.

“We start catching the bigger fish and then move on to smaller ones,” he said. “But while we move down to the smaller ones, we are also catching young or novice bigger fish, so they have no chance to grow. By the time we’re done, you get an ugly mud bottom and no life survives.”

The trawlers are efficient but to a fault, he said. They scoop up everything from large predators to small plant life and the result is a barren ocean floor, unable to support life of any kind.

An audience member questioned Pauly on his theories about this year’s low chum salmon count in the Squamish River system, which impacted the eagle count that was the third lowest in its 25-year history. While Pauly admitted to not being an expert on salmon, he said officials and his colleagues were dumbfounded.

“I think when the government says that they have no idea about the low chum that for once you are getting a completely honest answer,” he said with a smirk. “My colleagues have no idea what is going on, but it could be a signal of global warming.

“The salmon used to be abundant in Mexico and California, but now it’s gone from there. It’s also on life support now in Oregon and Washington. Alaska it’s still fine, but I think it might have to do with salmon having a problem with the increase in temperature.”

Despite all of the problems facing fisheries, Pauly said that there is still hope for the future and offered several suggestions to reverse the disturbing trend.

He said creating more marine protected areas would help the recovery process. Only one per cent of the world’s oceans are protected, compared with 10 per cent on land. Protected areas are growing too slowly and Pauly said that’s likely because we can see what happens on land but not in the water.

Pauly pointed out that subsidies to the fishing industries also should be drastically cut or eliminated. He said government subsidies help encourage people to fish when there really isn’t anything to fish. He also suggested a return to small-scale fisheries would be good for the industry.

“The return of small-scale fisheries as opposed to large companies are a part of the solution,” he said. “They employ more people, catch better quality fish, use less oil and waste less fish. If we have fisheries at all in the next 50 years, it will have to be small-scale fisheries.”

Pauly concluded that by following those steps, fisheries in Canada could return, but he appeared skeptical that these changes will ever take place.

For more information on Pauly and his research, visit [www.seaaroundus.org](http://www.seaaroundus.org).

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