

Satellite images show effects of trawling on seabed



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Trawling involves fishing boats that drag large weighted nets along the seabed, scooping up fish, plants and coral. They also leave behind clouds of sediment that Pauly calls "mud trails."

Scientists had earlier relied on murky underwater footage to assess the damage caused by trawling. But new images, taken by a QuickBird satellite owned by DigitalGlobe, show the effects with astonishing clarity.

Kyle Van Houtan, a scientist at North Carolina's Duke University, emailed the pictures to Pauly because he wanted more information about what he was seeing.

One image shows dozens of trawlers off China's Yangtze river as they leave behind clouds of mud and sediment.

Conservationists blame trawling for turning fragile habitats into dead zones where no organisms can survive.

"These are important photos and people need to see the images," said World Wildlife Fund spokesperson Robert Rangeley.

"It's just astounding to see how many trawlers are working those areas."

Earlier this month, more than 20 countries agreed to take action against unregulated trawling on the South Pacific.

The agreement takes effect Sept. 20 and is designed to protect about 25 per cent of the world's high seas.

Vessels must stay at least five nautical miles from vulnerable ecosystems, including deep-water corals, and will be watched by observers and ship locator monitoring systems.

The agreement was forged by Canada and other members of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization.

But Rangeley said the greatest deterrent against unchecked trawling could be consumers, who he said are increasingly choosing seafood obtained by more eco-friendly fishing practices.

"Markets are starting to make a difference," he said. "Worldwide, there more and more of a movement, particularly in Europe, towards sustainable seafood."

With a report by CTV's Todd Battis and files from The Associated Press