



Update On Fisheries

New Study Reveals Significant Decline In Fish Catches

Contrary to statistics released by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a new study, published in the 29 November edition of the science journal *Nature*, shows that fish catches have actually been declining since the late '80s rather than increasing as previously thought. At the current rate, by 2015, world fish stocks will have fallen by half. The world is "playing with the food supply of the planet," said Reg Watson, one of the authors.

According to the study, the discrepancies are mainly due to over-reporting by China, which accounts for almost 40 percent of the deviation between reported and corrected levels. "FAO must generally rely on the statistics provided by member countries, even if it is doubtful that these correspond to reality," the study points out. While some blame incorrect reporting by Chinese local officials, the authors point to the institutions involved in the reporting process. "The same parts of the state devoted to monitoring the economy are also tasked with increasing its output," they state. "Our studies showed that whatever China's leaders set as production targets is what is officially reported." Others, however, prefer to focus on the widespread problem of overfishing rather than looking for whom to blame. "This is a global problem not a case of a few bad actors," said Andy Rosenberg from the University of New Hampshire.

Agreement On Fish Conservation Adopted By UN General Assembly

The 56th session of the UN General Assembly on 28 November adopted an Agreement setting out provisions concerning the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks. The Agreement -- which will enter into force on 11 December following deposition of the thirtieth instrument of accession to the Agreement on 11 November -- also includes provisions on sub-regional and regional cooperation in enforcement, binding dispute settlement and the rights and obligations of states in authorising the use of vessels flying their flags for fishing on the high seas. It furthermore "invites" member states to provide assistance to developing and least-developed states to enable them "to develop their national capacity to exploit fishery resources" while ensuring adequate conservation and management of those fisheries resources. The Agreement also includes references to precaution, urging all states "to apply the precautionary approach widely to the conservation, management and exploitation of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks."

"Experts say Chinese overreporting masks decline in catches," UN WIRE, 29 November 2001; "Inflated Chinese fisheries data masks global fish decline," ENS, 29 November, 2001; ICTSD Internal Files.

