

# Fisheries Centre Researchers Make Waves

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**Over 75% of the world marine fisheries catch (over 80 million tonnes per year) is sold on international markets.**

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), is the only organization that maintains global fisheries statistics. As an intergovernmental organization, FAO must generally rely on the statistics provided by member countries, even if it is doubtful that these correspond to reality.

Using a world spatial catch allocation model developed as part of The Sea Around Us project, Dr. Daniel Pauly and Dr. Reg Watson of the Fisheries Centre showed that misreporting by countries

with large fisheries can cause globally inaccurate trends.

Their study showed that, contrary to consistent FAO reports that global catch sizes are stable or rising, fish stocks have declined alarmingly over the past decade.

Pauly and Watson reanalysed the FAO statistics, using information about factors such as food abundance and water depth to predict catch levels. Their model mirrored the FAO figures in most regions, but China's reported catches — which account for around 15% of the global harvest — are twice the predict-

ed figure. This means that world fish stocks have actually declined by more than 10% since 1988.

Dr. Pauly ascribes the over-reporting to local Chinese officials, whose promotion is linked to their ability to exceed production targets.

Watson and Pauly's paper, "Systematic distortions in world fisheries catch trends" was published in *Nature* in November 2001. Soon afterward, the findings were covered in articles in *The Economist*, *New Scientist* and *Time*, as well as a *New York Times* editorial.