

# Good news, bad news for fishery

By Judy McKinley

World-renowned global fisheries expert Dr. Daniel Pauly came to town recently, with good and bad news. The bad news: the global picture is not good. The good news: we still have time to do something about it. If we take action.

About 90 people came to the talk at the Tluu Xaada Naay Longhouse in Old Massett August 21.

Dr. Pauly isn't known for mincing words, and he made no exception in this talk. Starting with the collapse of the Atlantic cod fishery, he gave evidence of a repeated and predictable pattern of over fishing that can be seen all over the globe.

In the East coast fishery, officials knew it would collapse, but did not take adequate action to prevent it. The livelihood of 50,000 people were affected. Later an audience member asked if that "culture of denial" could happen here. "I find it distressing", said Dr. Pauly, "that no one has lost their jobs for that, no minister or civil servant has been sacked, no one has lost their pension. There is a lack of restorative justice. Canada has not dealt with this as a moral failure, a catastrophe as an act of malevolence. This allows DFO (the Department of Fisheries) to do the same thing again."

The cod fishery collapsed through a combination of over fishing and political wrangling. And even after the closure, the cod have not come back in any significant numbers. Why? "People think that no one is fishing

there, but that is in fact not true," said Dr. Pauly. Newfoundlanders still fish there. Sports fishers still fish there. There continues to be illegal fishing, and cod is a bycatch of the shrimp fishery there.

Can the story of the Atlantic cod fishery be generalized across the globe?

fisheries. Entire schools of fish can be plucked out of the waters in one swoop, and this leaves no fish to reproduce.











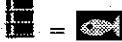

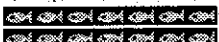

On a global scale, it is hard to get accurate official figures. Figures for catch in the world do not show a decrease even though stocks are crashing all over. China for example, is notorious

for over reporting their catch, a tactic to make it seem there are more fish than there are. The problem has gotten so bad, that while China isn't officially challenged within the UN, the FAO reports the global catch with and without China.

Another problem is bycatch. Thirty million tons of fish, 25-percent of all fish caught, are discarded because they are not the target.

Sports fishing is a sleeper problem. Part of the problem is that accurate statistics aren't generally kept, so the impact of what is thought of as individual fishers isn't measured. In the US, when there was one measure, industrial fishing weighed in at 8 million tons and sports fishing at


2 million tons, so there is a significant problem when these numbers are not accurately measured. Catch and release, a commonly accepted practice for

| FISHERY                                   | LARGE SCALE               | SMALL SCALE                 |
|---|--|--|
| <b>BENEFITS</b>                           |  |  |
| Subsidies                                 | \$\$\$\$\$<br>25-27 billion  | \$<br>5-7 billion  |
| Number of fishers employed                | <br>about 1/2 million     | <br>over 12 million          |
| Annual catch for human consumption        | <br>about 30 million t    | <br>same: about 30 million t |
| Annual catch reduced to fishmeal and oils | <br>35 million t        | <br>Almost none           |
| Annual fuel oil consumption               | <br>about 37 million t  | <br>about 5 million t     |
| Catch per tonne of fuel consumed          | <br>1-2 t               | <br>4-8 t                  |
| Fish and other sealife discarded at sea   | <br>8-20 million tonnes | <br>Very little.          |

There are typical problems that contribute to the continuing plunge of fish numbers and biodiversity.

Over-exploitation can in part be traced to the rise of technology that characterizes large scale industrial

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sports fishers, also escapes documentation. Like bycatch it adds up to dead fish, not consumed. Predators look for prey that are different and weaker, and these fish fit the bill.

As we over fish, we tend to fish out the predators first, and then the fish that they used to eat. This pattern is called fishing down the food chain, or fishing at lower trophic levels, and it means we may someday be eating jellyfish.

In part, we have a hard time seeing the scale of the problem because developed nations can afford to import fish. In West Africa, they already have no fish.

Here in Haida Gwaii we haven't seen the impact seen in other parts of the globe. But that doesn't mean we aren't already seeing trends. Our herring fishery has suffered, abalone is threatened, and in the region, sockeye fisheries have been closing over the last few years.

Not surprisingly, one of the solutions for sustainable fisheries is a radical return to small scale fishing. What might be surprising is that small scale fisheries are more economically viable, employ more people, are more energy efficient, have lower bycatch, lower start-up and capital costs and use more appropriate technology. So why the

massive subsidies to industrial fisheries that are proven to be ineffective?

Golf, says Dr. Pauly. The golf course is where the big decisions are made. So one strategy, he suggests, is to learn to play.

Aquaculture has been touted as one solution for our future needs. In fact, says Dr. Pauly, it's not the solution it was hoped to be. On the mainland here, Alexander Morton has been documenting the problem of sea lice. Already we are seeing escaped Atlantic salmon in our catch. And it takes four pounds of fish food - fishmeal made from fish like herring and anchovies that humans could eat - to create one pound of salmon. This also is not sustainable. In that case, the answer is to develop an appetite for a variety of high quality food. In Italy, anchovies are a favourite, and in Peru, the president has gone on TV eating them, setting an example for a new cuisine.

Another solution, one Dr. Pauly advocates, is the establishment of Marine Protected Areas. In the past, we had de facto marine protected areas. We could only fish so deep and so far. With modern technology, we can fish to a depth of 2 km and drag the bottom. The trails left by bottom trawlers can be seen from satellites. In essence, we are creating ocean desert areas, several hundred areas that will expand.

There are commitments to MPAs, and here in Haida Gwaii we have two in the works. But for now, almost all the MPAs are way behind their own target deadlines.

One question from the floor addressed a concern about seals as the problem. Seals and fish have long co-existed, said Dr. Pauly, so when seals appear to be a threat it's because fish numbers have already dropped so low. When seals eat the same amount they are indeed eating a higher proportion of the remaining fish. Blaming the seals though, he says, is like saying a patient died of pneumonia, not AIDS.

They become a misleading scapegoat for a human-made problem.

Afterwards, the buzz was that the scientist had made complex information accessible. As one audience member said, it's hard not to get depressed when we realize the state of our oceans today. There is no question that humans are responsible. But by learning lessons from history, with will, strategies and public pressure, we can shift the trend.

Thanks to Dr. Pauly, we can't say we don't know.

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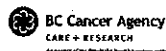


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