

Oilfish – the case of the imitation Atlantic cod

by Vicky Lam

A high demand for seafood, along with unsustainable fishing practices, not only results in over-exploitation of fisheries resources, but may also pose serious health risk. In December 2006, people in Hong Kong enjoyed eating inexpensive “cod” steak from local supermarkets, which cost 4 to 5 times less than the average cod. However, the “cod” dish caused its consumers to check into the hospital, due to intense diarrhea. It was later discovered that this lower priced “cod” was oilfish (*Ruvettus pretiosus*), which was imported from Indonesia and mislabeled as “southern cod”, “Canadian cod” or “codfish” (all translated as Atlantic cod in Chinese) when it was sold in Hong Kong supermarkets.

The retailers marketed this species as the higher priced Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*), which is listed as vulnerable in the IUCN redlist. It is hard for consumers to distinguish the real Atlantic cod steak from the oilfish steak. In

fact, *Ruvettus pretiosus* is poisonous to most people; its flesh contains indigestible wax esters, hence the many cases of oily diarrhea it caused in Hong Kong (www.news.gov.hk, accessed March 11, 2007).

More appealing titles for fish species usually enhance the marketability and market value of non-commercial and deep-water fish species that were previously unknown to most consumers. One of the most well-known examples is the Patagonian toothfish (*Dissostichus eleginoides*), which is now on the verge of “commercial extinction” (National Environmental Trust 2001), which was renamed Chilean sea bass, though it is not really a bass. This species was formerly considered trash fish by fishers. Another example is the rock crab, which was thrown away by fishers as bycatch, but is now on the market having been renamed as ‘Peekytoe crab’. In fact, renaming and mislabeling is common and affects not only price but

also the effectiveness of eco-friendly fish campaigns (Jacquet and Pauly 2007).

Although the misleading name of oilfish was claimed to be an error made in the translation from scientific name to English name on the health certificate issued by the Indonesian authorities, this incident reflected the shortcomings of labeling systems in the seafood trade. Due to the serious health issue, the Hong Kong government is looking into improving the fish labeling system, for instance, by including the scientific name in addition to the common name. This provides more information to consumers regarding unhealthy seafood but also allows consumers to distinguish fish from unsustainable sources.

Some people argue that we can maintain our seafood supply by targeting previously unexploited species or by being conscious consumers. However, as the case of the oilfish suggests, these goals may have unintended consequences. The alternative

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is, perhaps, to reduce our consumption and improve fisheries management - two endeavors that rarely lead to a hospital visit.

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In recent years, various global targets have been adopted to develop representative MPA networks

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A Global Plan of Action for Networks of Marine Protected Areas

by Louisa Wood

As part of the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), WCPA-Marine is the world's premier network of marine protected area (MPA) expertise, with members in over 50 countries. Its global mission is to promote the establishment of a global, representative system of effectively managed and lasting networks of MPAs. In recent years, various global targets have been adopted to develop representative MPA networks covering from 10 to 30% of the world's oceans by 2012 (United Nations, 2002; IUCN, 2003; CBD, 2006). WCPA-Marine has a unique strategic role to play in these efforts, and has been developing a Global Marine Plan of Action for 2006-2012, to support nations in developing MPA networks. From April 10th -12th, 2007,

WCPA-Marine held a Summit at the National Geographic Society in Washington DC, attended by 50 of the top marine conservation experts drawn from government, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, the donor community and academia. The purpose of the Summit was to finalise the WCPA-Marine Plan of Action, and agree on a new global MPA Call to Action.

Seven strategic priorities were discussed:

- 1) MPAs, climate change, and human health;
- 2) MPAs and management effectiveness;
- 3) The Wet List (see below);
- 4) Developing good practice for MPAs and networks;
- 5) MPAs, ecosystem-based management and marine spatial planning;
- 6) Fisheries, MPAs, and human well-being;

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The **Sea Around Us** project is a Fisheries Centre partnership with the Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia, USA. The Trusts support nonprofit activities in the areas of culture, education, the environment, health and human services, public policy and religion. Based in Philadelphia, the Trusts make strategic investments to help organisations and citizens develop practical solutions to difficult problems. In 2000, with approximately \$4.8 billion in assets, the Trusts committed over \$235 million to 302 nonprofit organisations.

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7) MPAs, species, and ecosystem management.

I was lucky enough to be invited to attend the Summit to share some of the experience I have gained over the last few years monitoring MPAs globally as part of my PhD research, particularly in relation to the development of the 'Wet List'. The Wet List (so named to bear relation to its well-known sister, the IUCN Red List of endangered species, but subject to change) is a new and innovative global partnership. The Wet List will be IUCN's global status report celebrating marine protected areas. It is designed to provide unprecedented levels of outreach to map progress and celebrate successes in marine conservation, as well as to identify challenges towards building networks of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and conserving the wider marine environment.

It is intended that the Wet List will take the form of an annually produced, single hard copy/web-based global overview, supported by 18 web-based regional reviews. These publications will be based on MPA data in the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), maintained by UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

The global MPA database I built, called MPA Global (see www.mpaglobal.org or www.seararoundus.org), was originally developed from the WDPA, and continues to feed directly into it. As a WCPA-Marine member, I will be working closely with UNEP-



*Delegates at the WCPA-Marine Summit.
Photo by Dan Laffoley*

WCMC and WCPA-Marine Regional Coordinators to develop appropriate strategies to meet the information requirements for the Wet List.

The Summit was an intense but invigorating three days, with an incredibly positive vibe and a real sense of purpose. As someone essentially at the beginning of my career, I left the Summit with a couple of feelings. Firstly, I feel profoundly honoured to have been invited to a meeting attended by such a rich, fascinating, intelligent, and downright friendly group of people. Secondly, I left feeling energised, optimistic, and empowered – this really is an exciting time for marine conservation. It's hard to make statements like that without sounding naïve or trite, especially given the massive disparity between current and desired levels of marine protection. However, I think the world is finally waking up. And we are getting organised. I'm excited to be part of this snowball, and to see where the next few years take us.

For more information about the Summit, including the session backing papers, the Call to Action, and WCPA-Marine membership, please see <http://groups.google.com/group/wcpamarine-summit/web>.

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The Wet List will [...] provide unprecedented levels of outreach to map progress and celebrate successes in marine conservation



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