



The Sacramento Bee
Life. Captured daily.

- Sections:
- [Business](#)
 - [Politics](#)
 - [State](#)
 - [Technology](#)
 - [Entertainment](#)
 - [Opinion](#)
 - [State Business](#)
 - [World](#)
 - [Health/Science](#)
 - [Sports](#)
 - [State Sports](#)
 - [National](#)

 [EMAIL THIS PAGE](#)  [PRINT THIS PAGE](#)  [NEWSLETTERS](#)  [MAKE MY HOMEPAGE](#)

CURRENT TOP NEWS REPORTS
The Sacramento Bee

Slippery statistics mask declining worldwide fish populations

By **JOHN HEILPRIN, Associated Press**
Published 1:27 p.m. PST Wednesday, November 28, 2001

WASHINGTON (AP) - Catches from the world's oceans are severely declining but the trend has been masked by China's practice of increasingly overreporting the amount of fish it pulls in each year, researchers say.

A team of scientists based at the University of British Columbia at Vancouver found that global catches, which were thought to be increasing during the 1990s by 700 million pounds of fish per year, actually have been decreasing by nearly 800 million pounds of fish annually.

Just one entity, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, compiles global fisheries statistics, but it relies on voluntary reporting of catches from countries to estimate the amount of fish the oceans hold.

The new studies being reported Thursday in the journal *Nature* call into question the veracity of FAO figures and its reporting system.

"FAO must generally rely on the statistics provided by member countries, even if it is doubtful that these correspond to reality," authors Reg Watson and Daniel Pauly said.

Moreover, by subtracting just one fish from the equation, the abundant Peruvian anchoveta, which is used only for fish meal and whose population fluctuates due to El Nino, an even more striking decrease was apparent: 1.5 billion pounds a year less seafood available for human consumption. "Misreporting by countries with large fisheries, combined with the large and widely fluctuating catch of species such as the Peruvian anchoveta, can cause globally spurious trends," Watson and Pauly said.

Since 1988, when the world's seafood supply peaked at 34 pounds a person each year, the combined effects of overfishing and increasing human populations have reduced the amount

[Rio de Janeiro declares war on dengue fever](#)
[RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil \(AP\) - More than 50,000 volunteers, soldiers, firefighters and health workers took to the streets Saturday in an attempt to stamp out mosquitoes responsible for a growing dengue fever epidemic. Dubbed "D-day Against Dengue" the mobilization seeks to eradicate bodies of standing water where the Aedes aegypti mosquito can lay its eggs, and to educate the population on how to avoid letting water accumulate in plant trays, drains, swimming pools or used tires.](#)

[Rejuvenated Hubble Space Telescope returns to orbit CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. \(AP\) - Space shuttle Columbia's astronauts set the Hubble Space Telescope free Saturday to behold the universe with](#)

of fish and shellfish available on Earth to only about 25 pounds a person per year now, according to the findings.

The trend is projected to continue rapidly downward to less than 17 pounds a person each year by 2020.

The studies' authors also note that the practice of aquaculture, or fish farming, cannot make up the difference since that system relies on the use of fish meal that comes from a third of all fish landed globally.

The Chinese government relies on local officials to provide catch figures. Wan Cheng, a spokesman for the Chinese Agricultural Ministry's Fisheries Department, said the government had offered county and provincial officials job promotions based on growth in those figures, giving them incentive to inflate numbers.

That practice ended two years ago, when the government put into effect a "zero growth" policy saying catch reports from oceans should not exceed 1998 levels of about 35 billion pounds of fish and shellfish per year.

Wan said preservation of fisheries is now the aim and there is no longer any pressure to boost figures, which also were subject to some defects due to imperfect methods of compiling information.

"Local government officials have no incentive to inflate their fishing output. Therefore, we believe there is no intentional overreporting of statistics, but only some possible statistical defects," Wan said.

"The Chinese government has noted the problem of falling fish stocks and is paying more attention to the preservation of resources."

Using statistics gathered by the FAO since 1950, the scientists created maps of world fisheries catches and then built a computer model to predict catch size in different ocean regions.

The model showed China's reported catches were unrealistically high when compared with catches from other ocean areas that have similar characteristics such as depth, temperature and biological productivity.

The findings came as little surprise to Lee Alverson, a global fisheries consultant in Seattle who headed research for the National Marine Fisheries Service in the Northwest and Alaska from 1970 to 1980.

"It takes a lot of nerve to make the sort of accusation they did about China, but there were a lot of scientists who felt nervous about those numbers," Alverson said Tuesday. "If any of the nations are putting bogus numbers into the accounting process, then our ability to assess if overfishing is going on is in jeopardy."

[sharper eyes and renewed energy, successfully concluding NASA's most challenging service call. "Good luck, Mr. Hubble," John Grunsfeld, the chief repairman, said as the telescope drifted off.](#)

[Court blocks action on ban on food made with hemp](#)
[SAN FRANCISCO \(AP\) - A federal appeals court has temporarily blocked enforcement of a Drug Enforcement Administration rule banning food made with hemp, a plant related to marijuana. The agency declared in October that food products containing even trace amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol or THC - the psychoactive chemical found in marijuana and sometimes in hemp - were banned under the Controlled Substances Act.](#)

[NASA's future safety comes under question](#)
[CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. \(AP\) - An advisory panel says that budget-strapped NASA is so focused on immediate space shuttle needs that long-term safety planning has suffered and the entire system is at future risk. "The panel's safety concerns have never been greater," the Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel said.](#)

[Swiss firm says MS drug approved for U.S. market](#)
[GENEVA \(AP\) - The](#)

 [EMAIL THIS PAGE](#)  [PRINT THIS PAGE](#)  [NEWSLETTERS](#)  [MAKE MY HOMEPAGE](#)

[Swiss biotechnology company Serono SA announced Friday that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration had approved the firm's multiple sclerosis drug, Rebif, for use in the U.S. market. The FDA move effectively breaks the "orphan drug status" granted to Avonex, a multiple sclerosis drug produced by Biogen Inc., which is based in Cambridge, Mass.](#)

[Proposed reforms create rush to file malpractice suits in Pennsylvania PHILADELPHIA \(AP\) - Attorneys rushed to file hundreds of medical-negligence lawsuits last month in advance of proposed reforms that could make it more difficult to win lucrative judgments against doctors and hospitals. The heaviest rush came Feb. 12 and 13, when the state Senate and House voted on malpractice bills. A total of 294 lawsuits were initiated - nearly equal the number of cases filed the first 90 days of 2001.](#)

[Mail-order chocolates recalled over unlisted ingredients WASHINGTON \(AP\) - An Idaho chocolate company is recalling batches of Florence's Exquisite Candies that may contain peanuts and other ingredients not listed on](#)

[the label - posing a possible risk to people with certain allergies. Recalled are batches of Florence's assorted milk and dark chocolates, nuts and caramels, and Cherry Cordials, as well as solid chocolate novelties.](#)

[Senate approves pipeline safety provisions](#)
[WASHINGTON \(AP\) - The Senate approved tougher pipeline safety provisions Friday and reached agreement on measures that would increase the use of ethanol in gasoline, while phasing out an additive blamed for water pollution. The pipeline safety measure, approved by a 94-0 vote, was inserted into a sweeping energy bill being debated by the Senate. Similar pipeline measures cleared the Senate in each of the past two years, but never made it through the House.](#)

[Man's death not caused by stun gun, medical examiner says](#)
[PHILADELPHIA \(AP\) - A medical examiner has ruled that the death of a man whom police tried to subdue with a stun gun was caused by a drug overdose, not the weapon. Anthony Spencer, 35, was intoxicated and high on cocaine when police responded to a domestic disturbance call at his home Feb. 12, officials](#)

[said. When police arrived, the 6-foot-tall, 280-pound man was brandishing a 7-inch knife.](#)

[Therapeutic cloning used in partial repair of defect in lab mice](#)
[BOSTON \(AP\) - The much-debated potential of so-called therapeutic cloning to cure disease has been demonstrated for the first time in a living creature with the partial repair of an immune system defect in lab mice. The approach is controversial because it involves making test-tube embryos that are genetic twins of the recipient. The embryos would supply stem cells but would not be allowed to grow into a person.](#)

BACK TO TOP 

[Contact Us/Feedback](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)

[News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Politics](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Lifestyle](#) | [Travel](#) | [Women](#)

[Cars](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Homes](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Shopping](#)

[Help](#) | [Maps](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Subscribe to the Print Edition](#) | [Traffic](#) | [Wireless Delivery](#)

[About Us](#) | [Advertise in The Bee](#) | [Advertise Online](#) | [Contact Circulation Customer Service](#) | [Events](#)

[Sacramento Bee Web sites]

[MovieClub.com](#) | [Sacbee.com](#) | [Sacramento.com](#)

Copyright © The Sacramento Bee / ver. 4

-->