

VINEYARD GAZETTE

ONLINE

SEARCH:

BROWSE:

Martha's Vineyard **Wednesday, March 13, 2002** [About Us](#) [Feedback](#) [Subscribe](#) [Change of Address](#) [Place Classified Ad](#)



VINEYARD GAZETTE

Front Page**Features**[Feature Article](#)[Nature](#)[Bird News](#)[Fishing](#)[Tides](#)[Obituaries](#)**Commentary**[Editorials](#)[Gazette Chronicle](#)**Calendar**[This Week](#)**Classifieds**[Real Estate](#)[Help Wanted](#)[Place an Ad](#)**About Us**[Subscribe](#)[Contact Us](#)[Advertising Info](#)[Our Mailing List](#)[Our Library](#)[Employment](#)[FAQ](#)[Our History](#)[Other Publications](#)

News

Studies Show Collapsing Fishery Wasteland

By MARK ALAN LOVEWELL

The National Marine Fisheries Service and the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) have come under harsh attack from a number of different environmental organizations for not having done enough to protect fish stocks.

Depletion is so evident, some scientists believe, that fish stocks will collapse unless stronger conservation measures are taken. Georges Bank, once among the most productive fishing grounds in the world, is now described by one fisheries scientist as a wasteland.

Daniel Pauley, a fisheries scientist for the University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre, delivered the first portion of his 30-month study of world fishing trends to the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science on Feb. 16 in Boston. The thrust of his \$2.5 million study, called Sea Around Us, looks at the fish stocks around the world over the last 100 years. All the graphs point



COMMUNITY

Weather

45 F / RAIN

[Current Conditions](#)[Five-Day Forecast](#)**Things to Do**[Dining](#)[Art Galleries](#)[Movies](#)[Music](#)[Theatre](#)**Travel**[Getting Here](#)[Getting Around](#)[Maps of the Island](#)[Towns](#)[Places to Stay](#)[Vineyard History](#)**Outdoors**[Conservation Land](#)[Walking Tours](#)[Beaches](#)[Lighthouses](#)**Island Info**[Self-Help](#)[Religious Services](#)[Landfills](#)[Libraries](#)[Schools](#)

to a dismal future.

Mr. Pauley told the Gazette last week that cod, haddock and flounder in the waters off Martha's Vineyard are so depleted that unless more stringent measures are taken fish will disappear.

Later last month Oceana and the American Oceans Campaign released their report, Oceans at Risk. They specifically criticize the National Marine Fisheries Service for failing to follow the standards written into the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The document reads: "Unfortunately, the U.S. government fails to carry out laws already on the books to help protect disappearing ocean wildlife and to reduce the numbers of marine animals caught unintentionally during fishing. In particular, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the lead federal agency charged with monitoring and reducing by catch, has failed to bring the nation's fisheries into compliance with federal laws years after Congress passed the law requiring action, and three years after the agency issued a report highlighting the problem."

At NEFMC's Newburyport office, staff members are reeling from the deluge of criticism and legal suits. Analyst and spokeswoman Pat Fiorelli said her office is on the defensive. "Stocks on Georges Bank are rebuilding," she said. "This is not to say that we can't do more to rebuild, but things are starting to turn around."

Last November, scientists with NEFMC reported that cod, haddock and yellowtail flounder are rebounding in the waters off Cape Cod. Council chairman Tom Hill told the Gazette at the time that recovery is well on its way. "Our goal is to have a successful biological system. I believe overall fisheries management has demonstrated when good measures are in place, that fish stocks grow and positive things occur."

Mr. Pauley, 55, has an entirely different perspective. His scientific research is funded principally by the Pew Charitable Trust in Philadelphia, the International Union of Conservation of Nature, and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, and shows an entirely different picture - of fishermen harvesting the bottom of the barrel. Looking at the North Atlantic "as a whole over the last 100 years," he said, Georges Bank may be better off than five years ago, but it is a shadow of what it was in the early 1900s.

"Georges Bank and the Grand Bank were a major factor in the colonization of the Americas. It funded the economics of the Northeast. It enabled the United States and Canada to amass great wealth," Mr. Pauley said. Of Georges Bank now, he said: "Today it is like the New Jersey rust belt - it's a rust belt underwater."

Once a world exporter of fish, this region has become an importer, Mr. Pauley said. A substantial amount of the fish appearing on ice at local fish markets and supermarkets comes from afar. Mr. Pauley said fish markets on Martha's Vineyard that years ago were shipping fish to the mainland are now importers.

"This lifestyle can only be maintained if other countries don't do what they should be doing to protect fish stocks," he said. "The end result is that we are running against the wall really fast. In one or two decades the fish won't be there."

Mr. Pauley said his team of 50 colleagues are looking at overfishing as a global issue and their work will continue for years to come. Their report is called *The Sea Around Us* and is dedicated to Rachel Carson, who wrote about many environmental issues including DDT and its devastating impact on wildlife. The only other parallel to this kind of research is being done by scientists studying global warming, Mr. Pauley said.

Fortunately, Mr. Pauley said, the United States does lead the world in trying to protect areas and establish sanctuaries that resemble the wildlife refuge on land. "This report brings forward the debate," he said. "There needs to be marine reserves, places where no fishing is allowed. The government is listening but not enough has been done."

Mr. Pauley is most critical of the fishing technique of dragging nets with heavy doors along the bottom; this heavy gear acts like a plow turning over bottom vegetation. Fishermen argue that dragging heavy metal gear on the ocean bottom doesn't harm fish if there is only sand on the bottom, but Mr. Pauley disagrees.

"They have plowed everything," he said. "It's like kids killing their parents and then they complain they are orphans."

The Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) offered its own attack on the NMFS in a report that came out after the Pauley report: "Correcting this problem won't be easy. But one tool that has been found to be effective in other parts of the world - yet has not been adequately employed by either the United States or Canada - is the designation or setting aside of marine protected areas, especially fully protected 'no-take' areas in which all extra active activities such as fishing, dredging and oil and gas drilling are prohibited.

"Scientists agree that fully protected areas are essential to help replenish overfished stocks and restore the health of ocean ecosystems," the report continues. "As it turns out, the residents of New England and Atlantic Canada fully support the idea and strongly favor the establishment of more such areas off their shores."

Conservation groups have combatted fisheries managers for some time. Last December the CLF, National Audubon Society, Oceana, Ocean Conservancy and the National Resources Defense Council gained a victory in a lawsuit when a U.S. District Court judge in Washington ruled that the National Marine Fisheries Service was not doing its job to protect fish stocks.

But going to court isn't the most productive way to resolve fisheries issues, said Ms. Fiorelli of the New England council. "There are over 100 lawsuits being directed at the NMFS," she said. "You've got to wonder what the goal is. The barrage of lawsuits is an

impediment to the real work at hand.

"Whatever their agenda," she said, "it is crippling management. It is quite stunning.

"It is incumbent to all of us to have correct information," she added. "Some of the reports, including the report by Oceanus about bycatch, are misleading. We at the New England Fishery Management Council have resolved a lot of the bycatch issues, and we agree there need to be observers on board vessels. You will see money come forward."

Ms. Fiorelli said the council and regional fishermen have been successful in bringing back sea scallops, now in full abundance. "Haddock, winter flounder and red fish are very close to our rebuilding target," she said. She said these reports are critical of the council for past problems not current management efforts. "We have a lot of success stories," she said.

A good part of the debate about fisheries management is taking place on the Internet. All the key players have their own web sites: Visit New England Fishery Management Council at www.nefmc.org; Oceana at oceansatrisk.com; UBC Fisheries Centre at www.fisheries.ubc.ca/projects/SAUP, and the Conservation Law Foundation at www.clf.org.

Originally Published in The Vineyard Gazette Edition of 03/08/2002

- [Printer](#) friendly version of this page

- [Email](#) this page to a friend
- [Share your Feedback](#) about this page
- [Back to Top](#) of this page

[Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Index](#)

MVGAZETTE.COM - Copyright © 2002 Vineyard Gazette - All Rights Reserved
Site Design and Development by [Metaface](#)

[Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Index](#)

MVGAZETTE.COM - Copyright ©2002 Vineyard Gazette - All Rights Reserved
Site Design and Development by [Metaface](#)