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AP BREAKING NEWS

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North Atlantic fishery collapsing

By Michael Smith
UPI Science News

BOSTON, Feb. 16 (UPI) -- The entire North Atlantic fishery is collapsing, not just local areas, according to the first-ever ocean-wide study of the status of fish stocks.

The international study shows that over the past 50 years, the catch of preferred fish -- cod, tuna, haddock, flounder and hake -- has decreased by more than half, even though the effort put into fishing has tripled.

"Within 10 years, we'll be talking about those fish as if they were a myth," said fisheries scientist Reg Watson of the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, one of the people who conducted the study.

"We'll all be eating jellyfish sandwiches by then," he said. The study was released Saturday at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Study leader Daniel Pauly of the University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre compared the study, financed by the Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia, to a weather map. "The map shows really bad weather over the North Atlantic," Pauly said.

Despite what seems to be progress in salvaging individual fisheries, Pauly said, the "big picture" shows that "we are unequivocally losing the battle to manage fisheries in the North Atlantic." National and international institutions whose job it is to control and manage fisheries have "largely failed in their mission," Pauly said.

He said the study shows the amount of fish in the sea today is about seven pounds per capita, down from about 21 pounds in 1950. At the same time, he said, governments surrounding the North Atlantic have been increasingly subsidizing the fishing industry -- subsidies that reached \$2.5 billion (U.S.) in 1997.

The cost of landing fish is also increasing, according to Peter Tyedmers of Dalhousie University in Halifax, with one of the main culprits being rising fuel prices: "The fuel energy needed to capture a ton of fish has doubled in the past 20 years," he said.

Fisheries scientist Andy Rosenberg of the University of New Hampshire said the problem can't be solved on a region-by-region basis.

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A former deputy director of the National Marine Fishery Service, Rosenberg led a drive to partly close the Georges Bank fishery. (The Georges Bank is about 100 miles off the coast of New England.)

But Rosenberg said that the fishery-by-fishery approach doesn't work: "It's just moving around the deck chairs on the Titanic -- the boats go elsewhere."

One possible solution is the creation of marine reserves, which have had beneficial effects in some areas, according to Callum Roberts of the University of York, in the United Kingdom.

Roberts advocated such reserves recently in the journal *Science* and is leading a session at AAAS Sunday on how to lessen the impact of high-tech fishing -- including such things as sonar, computer databases, and the Global Positioning System -- on fish stocks.

But reserves by themselves are only part of the answer, Rosenberg said. Without major changes in fishing policies through the North Atlantic basin, the fish stocks will continue to decline.

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