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Scientists urge huge reduction in North Atlantic fishing fleet

Fisheries scientists paint grim picture of fish stocks in the North Atlantic

By Portland Press Herald

Feb. 18 - WorldCatch News Network - Fishing fleets in the North Atlantic must be seriously reduced if depleted fish stocks are to recover, a group of scientists is recommending. A study released Saturday revealed that catches of preferred fish species such as cod, tuna, haddock, flounder and hake have declined over the last 50 years despite a tripling in fishing effort.

The study conducted by an international group of fisheries scientists painted a grim picture of fish stocks in the North Atlantic.

"The only way we are maintaining yield is by increasing effort," said Daniel Pauly of the University of British Columbia.

"But you need fish to make fish, so we have produced a massive reduction in productivity."

While collapses of fisheries in New England and Newfoundland have appeared to be local in scale, the study said the collapse affects the entire North Atlantic.

Serial depletion of large predatory fish at the top of the marine food chain means the major fisheries in the North Atlantic are now for invertebrates.

"We are fishing for bait and headed for jellyfish," said Pauly.

Andy Rosenberg, a fisheries scientist at the University of New Hampshire, said the problem of declining stocks can't be fixed "one fishery at a time because the boats move around."

"The effort simply shifts to somewhere else and makes their problems worse," he said.

Rosenberg said that beside a reduction in the size of fishing fleets, government subsidies to the industry must be cut and eventually abolished.

"The only solution is serious and immediate action to reduce the number of boats and to work toward a basinwide ecosystem approach that considers all species," he said.

"Systematically, we have a huge problem. We can't keep addressing this one symptom at a time."

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On May 1, the U.S. government will authorize shrimp imports from countries whose harvesting practices pose no threat to sea turtles. With the exception of Haiti, 42 nations are expected to be certified by Congress to export shrimp to the U.S. market, a State Department official told WorldCatch News Network on Monday.

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