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Last Updated: Thursday, 8 July, 2004, 13:02 GMT 14:02 UK

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Satellite data 'could save fish'

By Alex Kirby

BBC News Online environment correspondent

An ambitious plan to cut over-fishing by using satellites is put forward in a book on the growing fish crisis.

Charles Clover, author of *The End Of The Line*, says that putting monitoring data on the internet in real time would let citizens police fishing activity.



Plenty of fish for some: Starvation for others

He wants the European Union to create reserves in the North Sea and the North Atlantic to let fish stocks recover.

He says his idea would let everyone police the reserves, and the worldwide fisheries which European boats exploit.

Control by quota

Mr Clover, a British journalist, is environment editor of the London Daily Telegraph. He says Europe's fishing fleet must be cut, by giving offshore fishermen individual transferrable catch quotas, with a different system for inshore fishermen.

The EU should then set up a system of large marine reserves, covering a quarter of the North Sea and an equivalent area in the North Atlantic, from which fishing vessels would be banned.

Mr Clover writes: "Europe would allow the citizens themselves to police these reserves and the fisheries of the world where European vessels fish by making the satellite monitoring data on all EU vessels available for all to see on the internet in real time..."

“ The bottom line is that there are just too many fishermen, and fishing technology gets better every year ”

Charles Clover

"Open access to satellite data would be one of the conditions that went with the generous gift of fishing quota to fishermen by a benevolent public - who own the sea."

The book says 75% of the world's fish stocks are either fully

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exploited or overfished, threatening millions of people with starvation.

Told to stay away

Mr Clover's book also claims that modern industrial fishing is highly destructive, with North Sea trawlers killing 16 pounds of marine animals to produce one pound of sole.

It also argues that fishermen often have little choice but to break the rules in order to survive: 60% of EU hake landings and 50% of cod brought into UK ports is illegal, according to the book.

Charles Clover alleges he was warned he would be beaten up if he returned to the Scottish fishing port of Peterhead after describing its fishermen as "a kleptocracy".

He argues that fisheries are supposed to be ecologically healthy, economically profitable, and socially useful, providing employment for coastal communities.



Even Icelanders do not always find mature fish

But he concludes: "What's got to go, because it's gone everywhere else in raw materials industries the world over, is people.

"The bottom line is that there are just too many fishermen, and fishing technology gets better every year."

Praise for fast food

Mr Clover criticises celebrity chefs who do not enquire closely enough into the provenance of the fish they cook.

And he is dismissive of some of their customers, who he believes are too intent on the health benefits of eating fish to recognise its environmental costs and the superior claims of fast food.



Satellites could offer some protection

He writes: "I would advise the stick-thin patrons of exclusive restaurants selling endangered species to walk out and get...round to McDonald's."

Mr Clover told BBC News Online: "We've got to eat less fish, or fish caught less wastefully. The doctors tell us to eat more fish, but they've got their heads in the sand."

Tipping the balance

"Wild fish conservation is a human health issue. People worry about getting essential oils from fish, but by the end of the decade we'll have run out of fish oils."

Professor Daniel Pauly is director of the Fisheries Centre at the University of British Columbia, Canada.

He told BBC News Online: "The satellite idea is excellent. [Until] now the technology's always been used against the fish."

"But putting a black box on a boat will turn things round and help to even up the odds. Any boat without a box would automatically arouse suspicion."

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