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Tuesday, May 4, 2004

## Jellyfish for lunch? It's no joke, says scientist

As traditional fish stocks decline, some nations are turning to eating lower on the food chain

By [ROBERT McCLURE](#)

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

VANCOUVER, B.C. -- It's your wedding anniversary, so you go out for seafood. As you and your mate reflect on your years together, you're both salivating in anticipation of a fine meal of ...

Jellyfish?

That's the picture of the not-too-distant future painted yesterday for 1,500 fisheries scientists from around the globe by one of the world's leading fisheries researchers, Daniel Pauly of the University of British Columbia.

Kicking off the World Fisheries Congress, the veteran scientist showed how people's growing appetite for seafood has driven fishing boats from industrialized countries ever farther into Southern Hemisphere seas controlled by Third World nations.

It's a pattern also reflected in Puget Sound, where commercial fishing has virtually disappeared but a Seattle-based fleet goes all the way to Alaska to land the nation's biggest fish catch.

Pauly recounted how, as traditional fish stocks have declined, people in Third World countries increasingly have turned to eating lower on the food chain, even taking in the likes of sea cucumbers and sea urchins -- "stuff that eats dirt," Pauly said.

"When we first presented this, it was a joke -- you're going to have a jellyfish sandwich," Pauly said in his keynote address. "The journalists all ate it up -- not the jellyfish, the quote. It was a joke, but now it's real."

In the wake of the disastrous crash of the North Atlantic's cod stocks, the Newfoundland government is encouraging fishermen to go after jellyfish, Pauly said.

He said he recently was served some jellyfish in Thailand -- "kind of crispy, a noodlelike thing," said Pauly, who in November was chosen by Scientific American as one of the top 50 fisheries scientists in the world.

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You won't find sea cucumbers in the local Safeway anytime soon, but that time is coming unless the world's ravenous appetite for fish is moderated and fish stocks are allowed to recover, he said.

"This is the trend that is spreading throughout the world," Pauly told the group. In industrialized countries, "consumers have not noticed this massive shift in marine ecosystems because trade has intensified over the years."

Just south of where the conference was held in downtown Vancouver, at Granville Island Public Market, fish from New Zealand and Thailand are sold routinely, he said.

The raising of fish in fish farms, known as aquaculture, does not appear to be the answer, either, Pauly said. The reason: In most cases those fish are carnivores that must be fed by catching other wild fish to be processed into fish meal. The exception may be farming fish that eat plants, which is practiced in a few countries including China, India and the Philippines, he said.

"We are really headed for trouble," said Pauly, who has worked in the Philippines, Indonesia and Germany.

"There is a public dimension to this, but the public usually doesn't know about this."

Pauly, whose work has been funded in part by the Pew Charitable Trusts, a green-leaning philanthropy, is not without his critics.

"It's all right to be looking back, but I like to be looking forward," said Walter Pereyra, chairman of Seattle-based Arctic Storm Management Group, who is chairman of the National Fisheries Institute, an industry group. "There are innovations going on as we talk" to improve conservation in fisheries.

Fisheries are not static, but change with ocean conditions, Pereyra said. "The challenge is to manage the fisheries within those shifts," he said.

He pointed out that a recent report by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy singled out the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, which oversees Alaskan fisheries, for making decisions based on conservation principles. The chairman of another study group, the Pew Oceans Commission, has also spoken favorably about the North Pacific council.

Yet conservationists have called for scrapping the system of fishery management councils, saying they are dominated by industry and its friends.

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They point to examples such as the collapse of groundfish off the Washington and Oregon coasts under the Pacific Fishery Management Council.

"The thing that concerns me is that we have people who want to throw everything out," Pereyra said.

Coming up is likely an intense debate about solutions to the overfishing. Pauly, like many scientists, advocates a series of so-called "marine protected areas" where no fishing is allowed and fish stocks are given a chance to recover.

The world congress continues through the week. Its theme is "Reconciling Fisheries With Conservation: The Challenge of Managing Aquatic Ecosystems."

Featured tomorrow are discussions about how to make the seafood industry more environment-friendly and sustainable over many generations.

Pauly recounted how fish once overlooked as subpar have become dinner mainstays, as when fish from Australia and New Zealand known as "slimeheads" were rechristened "orange roughy" in the 1980s -- and promptly overfished. Similarly, Patagonian toothfish became "Chilean sea bass" and demand drove a thriving poaching business.

Now fishermen are starting to go after hagfish, but the development is so new that a fancy marketing name has yet to be invented, Pauly said.

What can concerned consumers do? They have a "huge role" to play by buying sustainably caught seafood, Pauly said, which they can do by printing out wallet-sized cards from the National Audubon Society and the Monterey Bay Aquarium that outline good choices. They can be found at [www.thefishlist.org/FishList.pdf](http://www.thefishlist.org/FishList.pdf) and [www.audubon.org/campaign/10/seafood/seafood\\_wallet.pdf](http://www.audubon.org/campaign/10/seafood/seafood_wallet.pdf).

Pauly also urged consumers to go further, learn about fisheries policy "and vote right," he said in an interview.

"The U.S. public had a lot to do with saving the whales," Pauly said. But "our compassion has to be broader than that."

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