

Fishy Issues

The upcoming documentary *End of the Line* explores the dire state of ocean inhabitants

Presented by



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"I don't think Canadians really understand how central they are to this whole issue. If there is one country in the world that's been forced to deal with the reality of disappearing fish stocks in a very stark way, it's Canada," says Charles Clover in his unmistakably educated English accent.

Environment reporter for the Daily Telegraph and author of the bestselling book *End of the Line*, Clover is used to people being a little ignorant on the subject of fishing and sustainability --even though the entire human species depends on a healthy ocean in order to thrive.

"People look out at the ocean and all they can really see is the surface. As long as there isn't an oil slick or floating fish carcasses, they think everything is all right. But they can't see what's happening underneath the waves -- and that's where things really get scary."

Clover says over the year he spent researching *End of the Line*, which was recently turned into a feature documentary by award-winning filmmaker Rupert Murray (*Unknown White Male*), he witnessed the last wild bluefin tuna schools illegally slaughtered in the Mediterranean.

He travelled to African fishing communities and saw entire generations of traditional fishers forced into alternative careers -- or criminal behaviour -- in order to feed their families when there was nothing left to catch.

He watched industrial fishing boats from Japan Hoover the bottom of the ocean floor, killing everything that had the misfortune of landing in their epic nets --big enough to bag a dozen 747s.

"It's not a story people really want to hear, but if we don't pay attention now, it really will be too late," he says.

"We have a tiny window to do something about this and I guess I'm resolved to the idea that I've become something of an accidental activist ... and not just a reporter, anymore. The knowledge has left me with a burden of responsibility," says Clover.

The facts are bleak, indeed. According to the latest data collected and analyzed by a think-tank of ecologists and economists, the world will run out of seafood -- and all large fish stocks --by 2048 if current trends continue.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) says 70% of our global fisheries are currently being fished at capacity, or beyond. Experts estimate 90% of large fish such as tuna are gone, and beyond recovery.

The global fishing fleet is 250% larger than the oceans can support, and Japan continues to flaunt international law by catching and processing illegally harvested Southern bluefin, which sits in a deep freeze owned and operated by manufacturing giant --and bluefin czar --Mitsubishi.

"You people in Canada have already seen what happens to communities and the ecosystem when you fish out a given species," says Clover.

"The reality of overfishing became obvious with the collapse of the northern cod stocks in Newfoundland. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans screwed up. They thought their job was taking care of the fishery, and not the fish. You have to take care of the fish first, because without the fish to catch, there is nothing for the people -- and this was a bit of a revelation," says Clover.

In Murray's filmed adaptation of Clover's book, which makes its post-festival theatrical debut this month, we follow Clover and a team of internationally respected marine scientists -- including The University of British Columbia's Daniel Pauly, Dalhousie's Boris Worm, and York University's Callum Roberts -- investigate various facets of the fish crisis without succumbing to despair and negativity.

"As upsetting as the information is, the more you know, the better equipped you are to deal with it and make a change. The people we spoke to in this movie see the looming disaster, but they also see all the things we can do to make the right changes. They refuse to lose hope ... and to some degree, that keeps me from losing hope, as well."

Clover says it's not easy putting on a brave face. He's faced some profound moments of rage along the way, from watching 80% of a catch thrown back into the ocean dead -- to phoning the head chef at Robert De Niro's sushi palace Nobu to ask why they serve endangered species.

"If you put a panda bear's paw on a plate with a sprig of parsley, the world would be ready to riot. You'd be lynched at the nearest tree. It seems mammals have all the luck when it comes to public relations. Look at the success the dolphin movie had at Sundance," says Clover, referring to the documentary prizewinner, *The Cove*.

"People care about dolphins, but they have a hard time caring about fish -- and in the big picture, the world's fish stocks matter a lot more than dolphins. But fish don't move people emotionally," he says.

"My hope is that this movie will open people's eyes to what's happening in our oceans and how dire the situation really is. I think Rupert made a beautiful film that will pull people in, and hopefully move them to make a change. The world's fish stocks are not endless ... they are ending." - *End of the Line* opens at Toronto's Royal Theatre on Friday, with other cities to follow.