

Science Fair

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No new areas to fish, study finds

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The frontier is gone when it comes to fisheries, a new [study](#) finds. Every area of the Earth's oceans except around the polar regions is being exploited, leaving no new areas for the expanding human population to open up.

Researchers at the University of British Columbia, universities in Spain, Australia and the National Geographic Society in the United States, used a measure of the 'footprint' of fishing to chart the systematic expansion of [industrialized fisheries](#). This measures the amount of microscopic organisms at the bottom of the marine food chain required to produce any given amount of fish.



CAPTION

By KEVIN SCHAFFER/ National Geographic Stock

The study is in this week's issue of the journal [PLos One](#).

Beginning in 1950 fisherman began to push out into the coastal waters off the North Atlantic and Northwest Pacific, into the high seas and south into the Southern Hemisphere. This expansion of the ocean territory that's fished continued until 2005.

By the mid 1990s, a third of the world's ocean, and two-thirds of continental shelves, were being fished. Only unproductive waters of high seas, and relatively inaccessible waters in the Arctic and Antarctic remain unfished. In contrast, less than 0.1% of the world's oceans are designated as marine reserves and closed to fishing.

During that time, the worldwide catch increased almost five times, from 19 million tons in 1950, to a peak of 90 million tons in the late 1980s. That then dropped to 87 million tons in 2005, the researchers say.

"The decline of spatial expansion since the mid-1990s is not a reflection of successful conservation efforts but rather an indication that we've simply run out of room to expand fisheries," says [Wilf Swartz](#), a researcher at the UBC Fisheries Center and lead author of the study, said in a release.

By Elizabeth Weise

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