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From Mexico to Brazil:
Central Atlantic Fisheries Catch
Trends and Ecosystem Models

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Fisheries Centre, University of British Columbia, Canada

**FROM MEXICO TO BRAZIL: CENTRAL
ATLANTIC FISHERIES CATCH TRENDS AND
ECOSYSTEM MODELS**

Edited by

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Director's Foreword

One often hears, when dealing with tropical fisheries, that "there are no data." Usually, this is not true and the complainers are usually persons who have not bothered to look, or at least not beyond conventional sources. A large fraction of standard journals in marine and fishery biology contain articles with tropical contents. Moreover, there is a huge, if gray, literature with valuable information on the state of marine ecosystems and tropical resources in the world, some of these reaching deep into the colonial period, which for many countries ended in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Thus, for the tropics generally, and for the Western Central Atlantic specifically, it is never true that there are no data.

What is true, however, is that the available scattered data are hardly synthesized and rendered coherent and thus useful for resource management and conservation. Thus, every applied project has to start from scratch at great cost, because "they have no data", and every evaluation of the state of resources or of biodiversity is marred by the absence of a sound baseline rooted in well documented accounts of the past.

This report, one of several similar reports by the *Sea Around Us* and *Back to the Future* projects, is devoted to two types of syntheses. One is the reconstruction of catch series, which are crucial in evaluating the present, and enabling a positive future for fisheries. Here, as in previous reports of this kind, the job was to reconstruct catch series, ideally from 1950 on, matching the period covered by the FAO statistics, and thus allowing an improvement of the corresponding countries fisheries data in the *Sea Around Us* database (see www.seaaroundus.org). Note that the comparison between FAO FISHSTAT and 'original' sources undertaken by most of the present reports are in fact comparisons between two 'national' data sets: 1) Data FAO receives from its member countries via national governments; and 2) National data obtained by the authors from sources as close to the initial collection source as possible. Thus, differences and discrepancies between these two sets can tell us a lot about data quality loss.

The other syntheses presented here are food web models of ecosystems of the Central Marine Atlantic. Constructing such ecosystem models requires large amounts of field data. In themselves, such models thus represent syntheses of previously scattered data. Moreover, such models form the basis for the exploration of alternative policies, a topic that has hardly ever been explored in the geographic area covered here.

With the exception of one model recently constructed by one of the editors (E.M.), these models are outdated, having been constructed during and right after a workshop held in 1996, and which I was supposed to have helped co-edit, a job I was previously unable to complete (the other contributions from this 1996 workshop, written in Spanish, will be published elsewhere). These models retain, however, their interest both as syntheses of the knowledge then available and as a starting point for more thorough and updated models.

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Daniel Pauly
Director
UBC Fisheries Centre
December 2003

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