

Sea Around Us

The Sea Around Us Project: July 2001 to April 2002

By Daniel Pauly

Although still young - it started in July 1999 - the Sea Around Us Project (SAUP) is now having a strong impact on the fisheries science and marine conservation communities. During the first two years of the project, we developed a method for mapping global fisheries catches, which was meant to allow the visualisation of catch trends in a manner radically different from any previous attempt, and at a much larger scale (Pauly and Pitcher 2000). It was hoped that this mapping, combined with other innovative analyses of fisheries, would not only allow to gain new insights about their impact of the underlying ecosystems, but also allow communicating the resulting insights to a wide range of audiences.

Mapping global fisheries initially was a vision, outlined in the proposal that led to the creation of the project. Then it became a plan. In November 2001, it became reality when we published the first paper based exclusively on that

methodology, entitled "Systematic distortions in world fisheries catch trends" (Watson and Pauly 2001). This study had a huge scientific and media impact (including e.g., an editorial in the New York Times), though opinions differ on how to interpret its key finding, i.e., that China over-reports its marine fisheries catches sufficiently for world catch trends to be distorted (going up in the 1990s, rather than down, as they did in reality). We have actively participated in this debate and we will continue to do so; interested readers might want to visit our web site (www.fisheries.ubc.ca/projects/saup) for a documentation in media such as television, radio, newspaper and magazines.

In the fall of 2001, we were informed, as well, that a proposal had been approved that we had submitted to the American Associations for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), suggesting that we hold a symposium devoted to 'Fisheries-induced

changes in marine ecosystems' during the AAAS meeting held in Boston in mid-February 2002. As well, AAAS offered to organise a much-coveted 'press briefing' on our behalf (see article by Reg Watson, this issue). Jointly with a well-attended press briefing, this symposium generated yet another media outburst, this time about the status of the North Atlantic, whose fish biomass we showed to have been declining for the last fifty years. This finding, beautifully mapped in the presentation by Villy Christensen, was supported by other studies initiated by the SAUP, documenting declines in the fuel efficiency of the fishing fleets, massive level of subsidisation and other pathologies.

The strong evidence we presented, combined with the excellent collaboration with COMPASS (Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea), notably Ms. Nancy

*Continued on page 2 -
SAUP Activities*

The Sea Around Us Project Newsletter

Issue 11 – May/June 2002

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**SAUP Activities -
Continued from page 1**

Baron, led a number of journalists, e.g., from *The Economist*, to pick up what they saw as a good story; thus, we even 'made' the cover page of the *Boston Globe* (see our webpage and *FishBytes* 8(3) (May/June 2002) for a documentation of the extensive coverage of these events). In addition to this broader outreach, much energy was devoted to targeted briefing of decision makers, notably the Pew Ocean Commission, the U.S. Ocean Commission and, on April 12, the US House of Representatives' Ocean Caucus. Other outreach activities include the start of work on a contribution to appear in *Scientific American* and other widely read magazines, and the completion and submission of a commissioned review of global

fisheries to *Nature*, where it should appear as part of an 'insight' section devoted to issues of sustainability and food security. Also, the SAUP will participate in the work of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), as this author has been invited to become one of the MA's 'Co-ordinating Lead Authors.'

Our analytic work on the North Atlantic, however, is gradually entering a new, calmer phase, where the contributions documenting our work and included in Fisheries Centre Research Reports (all of which can be downloaded from our website) are gradually turned into submissions for primary journals. Also a book entitled *In a Perfect Ocean: Fisheries and Ecosystems in the North Atlantic* by Daniel Pauly and Jay Maclean has been submitted for publication by Island Press. At the same time, project staff have begun working on the rest of the Atlantic, notably the Caribbean (see article by Dirk Zeller and Elizabeth Mohammed, this issue) and in West Africa, where an international symposium involving a number of African and European partners and

initiated by the SAUP will be held in late June (see the SAUP website and *FishBytes* 8(3) (May/June 2002) for details).

Though the third year of the SAUP is not yet completed, we can already see that this will be later viewed as the year in which we metamorphosed from a drab, caterpillar-like research project, peacefully munching on the rich growth of marine fisheries data, into what I frankly think is a rather stunning butterfly, with beautiful colour maps on its wings.

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The Sea Around Us website may be found at www.fisheries.ubc.ca/projects/saup, and contains up-to-date information on the project.

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