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Ideas, confidence and mentorship Acceptance speech for Volvo Environment Award, 2006

delivered by Carl Walters
on behalf of Laureates Ray Hilborn, Daniel Pauly and Carl Walters

Stockholm, Sweden, October 26, 2006

Minister Olofsson, President Johansson, President Arp, members of the Prize Scientific Committee and Jury, our beloved families, ladies and gentlemen. The duty has fallen on me to give this talk of thanks to you. I have that duty because I am the oldest and healthiest of the laureates, the only one who can both walk and talk.

I wish to reflect with you for a few minutes about why we were selected for this award, given so many perhaps more deserving people in the fisheries field. We have contributed little to the body of factual information

needed for fisheries understanding; we are not field biologists; and, as modellers and theoreticians, are held in some contempt by many of our colleagues. We cannot claim to have saved any of the world's fisheries. We cannot even agree among ourselves about what is needed and, in some ways, we have added to the

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The Volvo Environment Prize was presented to the Laureates, Ray Hilborn (2nd from left), Carl Walters (centre right) and Daniel Pauly (2nd from right) at the Concert hall in Stockholm on October 26 by Ms Maud Olofsson, Swedish Minister of Industry (centre); Mr Fredrik Arp, President and CEO of Volvo Car Corporation (far left); and Mr Leif Johansson, CEO and President of the Volvo Group (far right).
Photo by Peter Öhlander

general confusion. We have passed along information that has helped hard-working fisheries managers do a better job on some fisheries, but it is they that deserve the credit for the success of those fisheries.

We are known not as good scientists, but rather as developers of concepts and methods, of ideas. But why should it be that we have succeeded as idea people, despite much resistance to modelling among our colleagues?

Is it that we are especially good at having ideas? That is simply not the case. Our graduate students have more potentially important ideas in everyday discussion

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than we have had over our careers.

What has made us special is our confidence in our abilities to judge ideas worth pursuing when we see them, to work hard to develop those ideas where others would abandon them on assumption that if they were any good someone else would already have thought of them. Ideas are fleeting things, and if not grasped and carefully developed, they are soon forgotten.

What is the wellspring or source of that special confidence? In looking back over my own career, and Ray's since I know him very well, I must say that the confidence was not always there, and it appeared rather suddenly at key times when we received particularly strong support and mentorship from key people. Ray and I were given particularly critical mentorship and confidence by C.S. Holling, and Daniel received similar support from Professor Gotthilf Hempel.

Great mentors do not give the young people that they help the ideas that they develop. That is not necessary at all and can even destroy their confidence and trust in themselves. We did not get the ideas for which we are known directly from our mentors; we had to steal them ourselves from graduate students and colleagues.

In a very real way, those key mentors made it possible for us to be here today. We must thank them along with all of you, and we must dedicate our prizes to their honour. We owe and dedicate our awards to Professors Holling and Hempel, and to others who helped build our confidence and hence our careers over the years.

We dedicate ourselves to follow in their footsteps, and to try and be as good as mentors as possible to the generation of young scientists who will follow us and who must ultimately provide scientific solutions to the fisheries problems that we have failed to solve.



European parliament votes against serious threat to shark populations

from the Shark Alliance

The European Parliament has rejected recommendations to weaken shark finning regulations and has called for much-needed improvements to the rules. Although finning – dumping the shark's body at sea after removal of its fins – is theoretically banned in the EU, the regulations are too weak to actually prevent the practice from occurring.

Most finning bans rely on a fin to carcass weight ratio as a means of checking whether the number of fins landed corresponds to the number of bodies landed. Scientists and the IUCN (World Conservation Union) have recommended a fin to body ratio of 2%. The EU's current regulation stipulates a maximum of 5%. The European Parliament (EP) has now rejected a recommendation from its Fisheries Committee that would have facilitated the illegal finning of at least three sharks for every one landed through an inflated ratio of 6.5%. In a remarkable departure from the Fisheries Committee course, the EP is now calling instead for a decrease in the ratio to 2%.

One-third of European shark, skate and ray populations assessed now qualify for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (as Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered), with another 20% considered at risk of becoming threatened in the near future. A new scientific study, co-authored by Fisheries Centre Faculty member Murdoch McAllister, estimates that up to 73 million sharks are killed annually to supply the fin market (Clarke *et al.* 2006). Europe plays a major role in the global catch and trade of sharks. In 2003, Spain

was the world's largest importer of shark products, the second largest exporter, and had the fourth largest catch of sharks. The amendment to raise the shark fin to carcass ratio was championed by Spanish MEPs Rosa Miguelez Ramos and Carmen Fraga Estevez.

"With this vote, the European Parliament has acknowledged science, the precautionary approach and the alarming decline of crucial shark populations," said Julie Cator, Oceana Europe (www.oceana.org/index.php?id=81). "It is now up to the European Commission to follow the Parliament and strengthen the finning rules as part of an overall strategy for healthy shark populations and sustainable shark fisheries."

Reference

Clarke, S.C., McAllister, M.K., Milner-Gulland, E.J, Kirkwood, G.P., Michielsens, K.G.J., Agnew, D.J. Pikitch, E.K., Nakano, H. and Shivji, M.S. 2006. 'Global Estimates of Shark Catches using Trade Records from Commercial Markets. Ecology Letters 9, 1115–1126.

This article was extracted from a press release by the Shark Alliance. The Shark Alliance is a coalition of international non-governmental organizations dedicated to restoring and conserving shark populations by improving European fishing policy. Members include The Pew Charitable Trusts, the European Elasmobranch Association, MarViva, The Ocean Conservancy, Oceana, PADI International and Project AWARE Foundation and The Shark Trust. www.sharkalliance.org

