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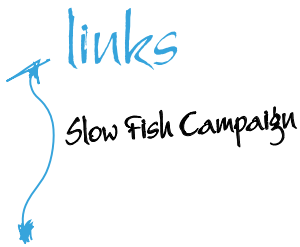
Pauly, D. 2011. *Slow in Coming*. p. 40-43 In: *The International Slow Food Almanach*, Slow Food, Bra, Italy.

FROM SEA TO PLATE

SLOW IN COMING

DANIEL PAULY

SLOW FISH



Fish is one of the most globalized food commodities, if not *the* most. Which is why extending the principle of the Slow Food movement to fish and fisheries is not that straightforward. But we can try. To do so requires that we understand what happened to the fish populations and fisheries along the coasts of those countries where the Slow Food movement makes the biggest progress. These are essentially countries—such as Italy in western Europe and Japan in Asia—which have large industrial-type fisheries, and which have sacrificed their small-scale fisheries on the altar of a ‘progress’ thought to consist of supplying cheap bulk fish to an ever expanding market at any environmental cost.

The environmental cost that was paid was obviously that the coastal fish populations around Europe and Japan were liquidated in the 1960s and 1970s, and that their decline went along with the decline of small-scale fish communities that had previously depended on these fish populations. Since then, European and Japanese fish consumption, along with that of other rich parts of the northern hemisphere, can be maintained only by increasing fishing in, and imports from, developing countries and the southern hemisphere. But

this will not last: indeed, the expansion of fisheries, which proceeded at the pace of one million square kilometers from 1959 to 1980, and accelerated to 3-4 million square kilometers in the 1980s, is now virtually over, and the world’s fisheries’ catch is slowly declining.

PROHIBITIONS AND PROTECTION

An alliance of proponents of Slow Food, environmental NGOs, and broad-minded representatives of the small-scale fisheries sector could help reverse these trends by promoting a ‘rebuilding’ agenda. Let us illustrate this in the case of Western Europe.







What is needed along the coasts of Western Europe are areas where there is no fishing—marine protected areas or marine reserves—where the fish populations extirpated in the last decades could be rebuilt, as would happen if they were left alone. Artisan fishers would then operate in an exploitation zone between the protected areas, catching the high-value, larger fish that have grown in the protected areas.

For centuries, fisheries were sustained by such a division of the fish population, one part in a (naturally) protected



WHY AN INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR FISH?

On our plates, fish just seems like a healthy and delicious food. But anyone who loves eating fish should know these facts.

-  Fish stocks are not unlimited. Many are overexploited. Bluefin tuna is at risk of extinction, and wild salmon, North Atlantic cod, swordfish and shark are all seriously threatened.
-  Intensive industrial fishing is devastating marine ecosystems. Extraordinary technical advances and a fishing industry with no geographical limits mean that marine resources cannot renew themselves.
-  Enormous quantities of fish (around 30 million tons) and other marine life forms are thrown back into the sea, dead or wounded, because there is no market for them. This is both an environmental tragedy and an incredible waste of food.
-  The market pushes us to always choose the same fish, increasing the pressure on a limited number of species.
-  Fish is one of the goods that travels the furthest to reach consumers.
-  Intensive aquaculture, which destroys coastal ecosystems and consumes enormous amounts of fishmeal (made from wild fish) is not a solution to overfishing.





area (the protection being afforded by depth or rocky ground, or any other feature making the fish inaccessible to the gear then deployed) and another within reach of fishing gears. This natural division has disappeared in recent decades (this is what technological development in industrial fisheries was all about), and the entire area of distribution of the most exploited fish species became accessible to fishing gear. The main out-

come was the virtual disappearance of these species.

Re-establishing the population of European coastal fish—some of which, such as Mediterranean groupers, are large and live a long time—will take decades, just like the re-establishing of a lost breed of sheep or a particular strain of olive, so dear to the Slow Food movement. But it can be done.

Slow fish thus will be slow in coming.

ILLUSTRATION: PERO LUSSO, G. FASSINO

To find out more

The Slow Fish international campaign informs fishers, consumers, fishmongers, consumers and cooks and encourages them to make responsible choices. All of these people can help to protect fish stocks. You can find many initiatives that prove the fact on the [web site](#).

Chef Dan Barber “fell in love” with a farmed fish. He tells the story at a [TED lecture](#).



But imagine the delight of preparing a meal of a fresh fish from the bay adjacent to the village which you visit every summer, caught by a fisherman you have gotten to know, at the edge of the marine protected area where you just dived with your two kids ...

We need to be able to imagine such an idyll to get the motivation to overcome the present mess, where we consume anonymous fish sticks bought in a super-

market that also sells estrogen beef and the breasts of de-beaked chickens, and which make us feel queasy because they consist of leftover fish protein fiber glued together (*surimi*). Or because they were derived from fish stolen by European vessels off Northwest Africa. Or both.

Whether or not it is certified as sustainable, what we have now is fast fish. If we want slow fish in Europe and elsewhere, we will have to give it spaces to grow in.