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Arctic not overfished: Nunavut fishing group

By CBC News
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"I certainly don't think there's overfishing," Jerry Ward, chief executive officer of the Baffin Fisheries Coalition, told CBC News.

He added that the Iqaluit-based fisheries group believes fishing quotas should only be increased if good science supports that kind of move.

Ward was responding to a University of British Columbia study published last week in the journal *Polar Biology* that estimated fisheries catches in Russian, Canadian and U.S. Arctic waters totalled 950,000 tonnes from 1950 to 2006 - nearly 75 times more than the 12,700 tonnes reported to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization during that period.

Independent observers

Ward said fishing vessels off Nunavut's coast are taking in less than six per cent of the estimated turbot population - a much smaller catch than in southern Canadian jurisdictions, because of the colder and more fragile Arctic environment.

Ward added that independent observers are closely monitoring the northern turbot and shrimp fisheries.

Dirk Zeller, the lead author of the University of British Columbia report, said he also does not believe there is overfishing in Canada's Arctic waters.

The problem, Zeller said, is that Canada and other Arctic nations are not properly reporting their catch data to the United Nations even though they committed to do so more than 60 years ago.

Catch numbers matter

As the climate changes and Arctic sea ice shrinks, Zeller said it is important to have accurate fishing numbers in the region.

"The question arises, of course: Why does the Canadian government not report any catches to the international

community?" Zeller said.

Zeller and his colleagues with UBC's Fisheries Centre, as well as the university's department of ocean sciences, arrived at their own estimates by reconstructing catch data from sources such as governmental reports and anthropological records of fishing activities by indigenous populations.

In addition to commercial fishing data, Zeller said Arctic nations should also be reporting catch data from small-scale fishing by people in northern communities.

That way, Zeller said it would give a more accurate portrait of what's coming out of Arctic waters - a portrait that he said could help protect Canada's Arctic sovereignty claims.

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