



Arctic Fish Catch 75 Times Higher Than Reported

Researchers at the University of British Columbia, reporting in a new study, found that the amount of fish caught in the Arctic has been severely under-reported for more than 50 years, making the northern ocean environment appear far more pristine than it really is.

The study estimates that fishery catches in the Arctic totaled 1 million tons between 1950 and 2006, almost 75 times more than the actual amount reported to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), according to the Canadian researchers.

Led by Professor Daniel Pauly, the team from the university's Fisheries Center and Department of Earth and Ocean Sciences calculated fisheries catch data from various sources, including limited governmental reports and anthropological records of indigenous population activities, for FAO's Fisheries Statistical Area 18, which covers Arctic coastal areas in northern Siberia, Arctic Alaska and the Canadian Arctic.

Fisheries reported 14,000 tons of fish caught in Russian waters off Siberia from 1950 to 2006, a far cry from the estimated 848,000 tons actually fished, according to the study.

Ineffective reporting "has given us a false sense of comfort that the Arctic is still a pristine frontier when it comes to fisheries," researcher Dirk Zeller, of the Fisheries Center, told Reuters in a statement.

"Our work shows a lack of care by the Canadian, U.S. and Russian governments in trying to understand the food needs and fish catches of northern communities," said Pauly, who leads the Sea Around Us Project at UBC.

Researchers from the Sea Around Us Project have previously shown a trend of fish populations migrating toward polar regions due to the effects of climate change. Along with increased accessibility of the Arctic areas due to melting sea ice, immense pressure is placed on the region for future large-scale fisheries.

"This research confirms that there is already fishing pressure in this region," Pauly said. "The question now is whether we should allow the further expansion of fisheries into the Arctic."

"Conservation efforts in the Arctic have so far focused on the exploitation of marine mammals – seals and polar bears are frankly easy on the eye and plain to see," said Zeller. "None of them would survive, however, if we allow over-exploitation of fish in this delicate but so-far neglected ecosystem."

The results of the study were published this week in the journal *Polar Biology*.

On the Net:

- [University of British Columbia](#)
- [United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#)
- [Sea Around Us Project](#)
- [Polar Biology](#)

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