

Less and less fish in the oceans – if only they stopped throwing dead fish back into the ocean!

Posted 3 days ago



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You all heard it – we are catching too much fish. Growing demand for food is driving fishing industry to catch more and more fish in the world's oceans, which is driving our rich fisheries to their limits. Solution would be to eat less fish, which is unlikely to happen, or to support fish farms. However, there might be another solution we didn't know about before – not throwing out good fish after it's been caught!



This boat is meant to catch eel – everything that it not eel is a bycatch and can be thrown away. Image credit: JLPC via Wikimedia (CC BY-SA 3.0)

How is this for news for you – fishing boats catch fish that they don't want every day and release it back into the ocean. Reasons being unmarketable look, species of fish not being in season or just because only parts of the fish can be sold at a high price. For example, if fishing boat is targeting a specific kinds of fish, it is going to throw out all other. Of if the fish is too small or gets damaged in the process. But wait, it gets even more ridiculous. Sometimes a fishing boat is full yet it continues fishing. If it catches bigger fish (or more expensive one) it will throw out its previous catch.

Now scientists from the Sea Around Us project at the University of British Columbia's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries and the University of Western Australia estimated that around 10 % of the catch in the last decade has been thrown out like this. "Released" is not a good term, because the fish is dead and at the very best can be eaten by other ocean animals. The practice, called high-grading, is especially nasty, because fishermen catch all the fish they can sell but continue looking for better ones. If they do catch something bigger, they simply throw away what they had before and thus meet they quotas and increase their revenues.

It actually used to be worse. In the 1950s, about five million tonnes of fish were discarded every year. This number grew until in 1980s it reached 18 million tonnes. Now it is around 10 million tonnes per year for the last decade. So you think situation is getting better? Well, not really. The decrease we are seeing is due to technological innovation and better management, but mostly because our fish stocks are declining at a rate of 1.2 million tonnes of fish every year. Dirk Zeller, lead author for the study, said: "Discards are now declining because we have already fished these species down so much that fishing operations are catching less and less each year, and therefore there's less for them to throw away".

10 % is a huge number. Decreasing fishing by 10 % would be a huge improvement in so many areas. It would be easier for fishermen, it would be much better for the ocean, fish could potentially get cheaper, if only they stopped throwing away good fish. But that's not going to happen, because people do not like buying not so good looking sea goods.

Source: [University of British Columbia](#), *Sea Around Us*.

Link: <https://www.technology.org/2017/06/27/less-and-less-fish-in-the-oceans-if-only-they-stopped-throwing-dead-fish-back-into-the-ocean/>