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Massless catch

## We are starting to fish

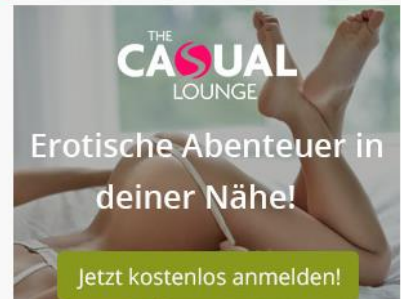
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**Fish fingers, smoked salmon, sushi - fish is more popular than ever as food. But it is becoming clearer and clearer: we are out of the fish. Now researchers are calling for a catch.**



Fish is increasingly in demand as a foodstuff: As a healthy alternative to pork steaks and chicken thighs, fish is regularly on the menu for more and more people. In 2014, fish consumption exceeded 20 kilograms per capita per year for the first time. Switzerland and the EU even surpass this global average: we eat 22 kilograms of fish per capita per year. Not only the amount per capita increases, but also the share of the fish in the total meat consumption. In 1949, fish accounted for 12 percent. Today, its share is 17 percent.

That fish is so popular is due to decades of marketing. This is stated by Billo Heinzpeter Studer, President of Fair-fish International, an organization dedicated to the welfare of fish in aquaculture. "The fishing industry has boosted consumption massively. It wanted to generate new sales markets," says Studer. They succeeded with the invention of the fish stick in 1955.

Rising prosperity is also driving the consumption of fish, says Dirk Zeller, a marine biologist at the University of Western Australia: "Prosperity means buying more expensive food. That includes, for example, the trendy sushi. »

To satisfy the global hunger for fish, an incredible 4.6 million fishing boats travel the world's oceans. Every year, 80 million tons of fish are brought to the deck. This corresponds to the load of a freight train that reaches around half the globe. This does not include bycatch - ie fish and other animals that are not eaten - these are thrown overboard: Seven million tons of senseless fish are turned to waste each year on the high seas. Each year, 12 million tons of fish are extracted from the lakes.

### **Counting fish is impossible**

The figures come from the "State of the World Fisheries" report regularly published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). But the information is very inaccurate, says Dirk Zeller. «The data ignore the catches of small fishermen and hobby fishermen. Likewise, illegal fish catches and part of the bycatch do not appear in the statistics. »

The marine biologist conducts research in a team that statistically reconstructs the quantities actually caught as part of the "Sea Around Us" research initiative. His results show frightening. The largest quantities were caught in 1996 - 130 million tonnes of marine fish. Since then, catches have decreased by 1.2 million tonnes annually. If the trend continues, annual catches will be as low as 60 million tonnes by 2050, well below what is currently consumed

By-catch: In addition to the originally intended prey, herring, this net of a German fishing boat has also brought many small fish, starfish and crabs from the sea.

No one knows exactly how big the stocks are today. "Counting fish in the sea is impossible," says marine biologist Jason Hall-Spencer of Plymouth University in the UK. "They swim freely in the sea where we can not see them. We can only make estimates. "Statistical data from the North Atlantic show that biomass for large fish has decreased by a factor of nine in the last hundred years. This means that since the beginning of the 20th century, fish stocks have collapsed by about 90 percent. "That means, we just go out the fish," says Zeller.

## Which fish can still be eaten in good conscience?

Fish is delicious and healthy. However, the oceans are increasingly overfished and stocks are shrinking. Which fish is allowed on our table?

[Read on here](#)



<p> Which wine should it be? Fish and seafood are more versatile than you think. </ P>

### Subsidies drive overfishing

"The stocks have already sunk so far that fishing is no longer profitable," says Billo Heinzpeter Studer of Fair-Fish International. "The fishermen often do not even get the price for the boat's fuel with the proceeds from their catches."

To make sure industrial fishing still pays off, the authorities are supporting fishermen worldwide with 35 billion francs. Thus, according to the UN, already 20 percent of a fish at the counter paid by the taxpayer.

How this mechanism works is explained by Michael Melnychuk, fisheries expert at the University of Washington: If the cost of catching fish is higher than the revenue from selling the fish, then there is no reason to go fishing, he says. "If you left the fishery to the open market, it would reduce itself." But if governments reduce the price of fuel for fishing boats, for example, the costs go down. Result: The fishermen continue to catch with the help of the state and bring the fish stocks to collapse.

Leaving the fishery to the market would ease the pressure on the seas. But there are forty million jobs in marine fishing worldwide. That's why governments struggle to cut subsidies. "Many subsidies have grown historically," says Dirk Zeller of the University of Western Australia. "Once they get there, it's hard to get rid of them. In addition, the fishing industry has a strong lobby and politicians are too helpful to accommodate the fishermen. They secure their votes. »

The subsidies not only have catastrophic effects on fish stocks, they also encourage useless investment in the fishing fleets. "Today, the global fishing fleet is twice as big as it would be necessary for efficient fishing," says Zeller. In addition, most of the subsidies go to industrial fisheries in the rich industrial nations and not to the small-scale fishermen in developing countries whose livelihood and livelihood depend on food from the sea. "Fishermen in developing countries are at a disadvantage because their governments do not have the financial means to compete with developed countries," a European Parliament report says. Small fishermen are being driven out of business by the big fleets. But small-scale fishing employs 24 times more people than industrial fishing, says Studer of Fair-fish International. "Subsidizing industrial fishermen does not promote jobs but their destruction," he says. "A fisherman in Senegal told me how, as a boy in the 1960s, he could catch the fish with a net on the beach. Today he does not even catch anything if he takes the boat out to the open sea. "

### **Scientists call for catches**

However, the biggest problem for fish populations is not even the number of animals, but the changing age structure. "For most of the fished species, the old and most fertile fish were removed," says Australian marine biologist Dirk Zeller. But just the old females are enormously important for the preservation of a population. Because they not only produce much more eggs than the young, but also eggs of better quality.

The fish need protected areas in which they can reproduce undisturbed, the experts agree. It needs large protected areas in all oceans, in which fishing is forbidden. For example, less than one percent of UK's territorial waters are currently protected. Worldwide, the proportion of protected areas permanently closed to fishing is only one per mille. "The size of the protected areas should be at least 20 percent of the sea surface," says Hall-Spencer. These areas are to become breeding grounds, where the old females produce a large number of offspring and thus keep the stocks at a high level. However, setting up such protected areas is an endless political process. That's why scientists are calling for a catch.

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