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FISHMEAL WORLD R&D

NBC, students latest to slam fishmeal sector for pollution, overfishing

By Neil Ramsden Nov. 22, 2019 18:08 GMT



© Birds circle a fishing boat off the coast near Piura, Peru. Credit: OSTILL is Franck Camhi/Shutterstock.com

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China is hungry for seafood

An investigation conducted by the Global Reporting Program and *NBC News* is the latest to "reveal hidden costs to fishing the oceans for fish farms".

"The Fish You (Don't Know You) Eat" -- a yearlong investigation of the global fishmeal industry -- uncovers a supply chain from Latin America, to West Africa, to China that is "polluting the ocean, causing food insecurity in coastal communities, and risking the collapse of fisheries", they said.

An in-depth multimedia project, and a short documentary for *NBC Nightly Films*, explore three nodes of the fishmeal supply chain: the growing demand from China, where most of

the world's fish farms operate; the growing supply from Peru, the largest producer of fishmeal; and increasing resistance to the industry by coastal communities in West Africa, the authors said.

Fourteen journalism students from the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada, University de Los Andes in Colombia, and Nanjing University in China were commissioned to report on the fishmeal supply chain.

The journalism students were joined by three students from UBC's Institute for Oceans and Fisheries, and two from UBC's Medicine Department, "adding scientific rigor to the project" – testing samples from the field and providing context through academic research, the report said.

China, home to 60% of the world's fish farms, requires vast quantities of fishmeal to feed these fish. In their own waters, Chinese fishermen now target so-called "trash fish" – which the report states are fish taken from the bottom of the food chain, and often juveniles – to feed the aquaculture industry.

"The demand for both fishmeal and so-called trash fish is putting increasing pressure on our marine resources," said Daniel Pauly, a leading fisheries scientist and advisor on the project.

"China's voracious demand for fishmeal means they now rely on fishmeal from abroad, particularly Peru, to feed their farms. Peruvian 'superprime' fishmeal is made from anchovy. But this fish is also the main food source of marine mammals like penguins and sea lions, as well as fish higher up on the food chain," it reads. "The fishmeal industry, along with the growing climate crisis, is putting these animals in jeopardy."

The report also touches on Africa. In Senegal and The Gambia, where a dozen foreign-owned fishmeal factories have opened in recent years, coastal communities are struggling as

fish are being redirected to these factories, endangering a way of life that locals have known for centuries, it said.

Students discovered pipes from a Chinese-owned factory in Senegal pouring toxic effluent back into the ocean, which many locals say is having detrimental impacts on their health, the report claimed.

"After testing the effluent, they found dangerously high levels of four heavy metals."

IFFO calls for collaboration

IFFO -- the Marine Ingredients Organization -- said it was aware of the reports produced by the Global Reporting Centre, "with which it fully cooperated during the whole duration of the investigation, giving them access to a great deal of technical information as well as interviews with the technical director for discussions, and a filmed interview".

Fishmeal and fish oil hold an important position as the foundation of the world's fed aquaculture production, it told *Undercurrent News*. "They are not replaceable as nutrients in aquafeeds due to the particular nutrients that are provided uniquely by these materials." "To continue facing these needs [feeding a global population], aquaculture relies on a good supply of quality feeds that farmed animals would eat in the wild: fishmeal and fish oil provide these proteins which are not found in other ingredients," said Petter Johannessen, IFFO's director general.

Certification is an independent way of reviewing the production practices and the responsible sourcing of material, IFFO said.

52% of the raw material for fishmeal and fish oil production comes from certified plants, and the fisheries supplying the raw material have been verified as largely well-managed by independent NGOs such as the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, said Johannessen.

In addition to whole fish, one-third of fishmeal and fish oil annually is manufactured from fisheries byproducts, it added. "The trend for the use of this material is increasing."

"Fishmeal factories are expected to comply with national regulations including those for environmental impacts management. There are many examples of the industry adopting technology around the world, such as wastewater treatment as well as deodorization units to manage the environmental impacts of the production process."

Johannessen concluded: "Although largely the fisheries supplying raw material are well-managed, IFFO recognizes that there are challenges in the responsible sourcing of raw material for fishmeal and fish oil production in some countries. IFFO expects adherence to existing regulations and is supportive of certification schemes and the adoption of approaches such as fishery improvement projects based on the principle of collaboration."

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