

## Book Reviews

### Editor

Dr Chuck Hollingworth

### The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World

Edited by Bjørn Lomborg, partially translated (from Danish) by Hugh Matthews

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001. ISBN 0521-80447-7 (hardbound, \$70.00), 0521-01068-3 (paperback, \$28.00). Soft or hard cover, pp. xxiv + 515, numerous tables, boxes and figures.

Many of those who reviewed Bjørn Lomborg's *Skeptical Environmentalist* (1) mentioned that its scope is too broad, covering too many environmental disciplines, for anyone to be able to provide a competent review of the whole book. Instead, they concentrated on their area of expertise (global warming, species extinction, water supply, etc.), and found that at least for that area, Lomborg's Panglossian zeal had driven him to quote selectively from the literature, or to misrepresent it (see reviews in *Science*, *Nature*, *Scientific American*, etc.).

*The Skeptical Environmentalist* devotes only two pages to fisheries and aquaculture (pp. 106-108, plus a few scattered mentions on other pages), in line with its author's belief, based on his use of misleading global averages, that "... fish constitute a vanishingly small part of our total calorie consumption - less than 1% - and only 6% of our protein intake stems from fish ... etc."

Let us not quibble about this 6% global average, masking the utter dependence on cheap fish of millions of people in developing countries. Let us read on (noting that the superscripts refer to both Lomborg's and my sources).

Lomborg, using Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons* (2) as his key metaphor, admits that fisheries have an overfishing problem. However,

[t]he oceans could produce about 100 million tons of fish a year, which we can harvest "for free" (in the sense that we do not have to feed them). Right now, we only catch about 90 million tons, the missing 10 million tons being the price

we pay for over-fishing the sea (3). [... Not] catching the extra 10 million tons is inefficient, but in effect equivalent to just putting the world food development back a bit less than three weeks.

Should we quibble about this disconcerting, cavalier attitude about what clearly is a bigger issue than setting back world food development - whatever that is - by 3 weeks?

Those readers who have seen our recent paper on world fisheries catch trends (4) will appreciate the irony of what then follows, i.e. "total fish production has increased so much that the fish per capita in the late 1990s once again exceeded all previous years" (5). Can we blame Lomborg for basing all his arguments on raw FAO landings and aquaculture production data, and for not knowing that China, by over-reporting its marine fisheries landings to FAO, generated increasing world landings during a period (the 1990s) which, in reality, saw global landings decline (or stagnate if you include aquaculture production), and drag per caput consumption down (4)? We shouldn't. But we should fault him for posing as an expert, then telling us that stagnating or declining trends of fish landing per caput don't matter because we can always farm the fish we need, since "it appears of minor importance whether the consumer's salmon stems from the Atlantic ocean or a fish farm."

You can feed flippancy to your readers, but you must feed fish to salmon, in form of fish meal and oils (salmon otherwise taste like tofu), and this fish has to come from some fishery (6). Yet, Lomborg had conceded that catches cannot be increased above 100 million tons (see above). We shall leave it at this, and not follow up on the mockery implied by his quoting FAO to the effect that "fish consumption will increase dramatically - per person by more than 23% till 2030."

So what does this tell us? One lesson is that reviewing this book is indeed difficult: it is necessary to be well versed in one's specialized discipline to spot where Lomborg picks and chooses. Those reviews of individual chapters that I have read suggest that Lomborg's treatment of environmental issues is biased and misleading. Let us add his treatment of fisheries to the litany.

### References

1. Lomborg, Bjørn (2001) *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

2. Hardin, G. (1968) The tragedy of the commons. *Science* 262, 1, 243–248.
3. FAO (1997) *State of the world fisheries and aquaculture 1996*. Available at <http://www.fao.org>. [From <http://www.fao.org>; in fairness to FAO and to Lomborg, we must cite his annotation to this reference: "FAO warns that if we do not become better at coordinating our fisheries, catches could drop another 10 million tons".]
4. Watson, R. and Pauly, D. (2001) Systematic distortions in world fisheries catch trends. *Nature* 414, 534–536. [Where the demonstration is made that once over-reporting of marine catches by China is accounted for, global fish catches turn out to have declined since the late 1980s; further, this decline is accelerated if one omits the Peruvian anchoveta, the fluctuations of which mask global trends, and which is double-counted anyway (see comments to reference 6).]
5. FAO (2001) *State of the world fisheries and aquaculture 2000*. [Same source as for (3); here, Lomborg comments: "The dip in marine catches of more than 9 percent in 1998 was due mainly to El Niño, especially affecting the landings from the Southeastern Pacific." Does this imply that such catch 'dip' was an exception? But the frequency of El Niño events has lately been increasing. Or does it mean that anchoveta catches are not representative of global fisheries trends? But is not the Peruvian anchoveta, the catches of which do 'dip' during El Niño events, furnishing (with other small and not so small fishes) the bulk of the animal protein required by Lomborg's farmed salmon?]
6. Naylor, R.L., Goldburg, R., Troell, M., Beveridge, M., Clay, J., Folke, C., Kautsky, N., Lubchenco, J., Mooney, H. and Primavera, J. (2000) Effect of aquaculture on world fish supplies. *Nature* 405, 1017–1024.

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### **Right Whales: Worldwide Status**

(The Journal of Cetacean Research and Management, Special Issue 2)

*Edited by P. B. Best, J. L. Bannister, R. L. Brownell Jr and G. P. Donovan*

International Whaling Commission, Cambridge,  
2001. ISSN 1561-073X, £40, US\$ 70, €70. Hard cover,  
pp. xii + 309, 98 tables, 98 figures. Available from  
International Whaling Commission.

This book presents a fascinating and comprehensive insight into the global status of right whales. The opening introduction deftly summarizes the history of whaling and leads the reader into a report from

the workshop on the comprehensive assessment of right whales worldwide. This report is clearly written and structured, making it a pleasure to read. Many facets including stock identity, population structure, estimates of abundance, population models, anthropogenic impacts and management implications are presented. The editors have skillfully honed the report to make these complex and interwoven facets digestible to the reader.

The bulk of the volume is devoted to individual papers, grouped into studies of southern right whales, North Atlantic right whales and North Pacific right whales. Given the precarious status of the North Atlantic right whale, the volume justifiably includes a further workshop report on status and trends in the western North Atlantic. Again, this report is skillfully worked into a digestible and informative document by the editors.

One is left with a lasting impression of dedicated and committed researchers the world over, contributing their skills to the vital task of unravelling the enigma that surrounds the lives of these animals. Piece by piece, the jigsaw is taking shape, but much work remains to be done. For a species that has been as mercilessly exploited as the right whale, the significance of these endeavours, and the influence they can bring to bear on management and conservation measures, cannot be overstated. The contributors can feel justifiably proud to have their names associated with this worthy endeavour, and I commend it as sound reference at the beginning of the 21st century.

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