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Nobody Really Knows If Tuna Is Sustainable

A new report may be the first accurate look at how much tuna is fished globally.

By [Mike Pomranz](#) | October 07, 2019



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Canned tuna is about as common as grocery products come. It's the kind of item that's so ubiquitous you might have a can in your cupboard and not even remember. But it turns out this casual approach to buying tuna has applied to how data on fishing tuna has been gathered as well—and if we don't start looking at the numbers, tuna might not remain as commonplace as it is today.

In a recent study published in the journal *Fisheries Research*, a team of primarily Canadian researchers determined that the current reporting on tuna fishing was essentially incomplete—and as a result, tuna might not be as sustainable as we're currently being led to believe. So the researchers compiled and standardized information from the five "regional fisheries management organizations" to finally paint a global picture. Lead author Angie Coulter, a researcher with the Sea Around Us initiative at the University of British Columbia's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, said that maintaining the tuna industry requires "the cooperation of more than 100 countries engaged in tuna fisheries." As such, this study is billed as the first accurate global look at tuna fishing data.

Incredibly, the research found that tuna catches have increased by over 1,000 percent in the past six decades—an issue that isn't inherently a problem but could spell trouble if accurate data isn't being kept to make sure we're not endangering species of tuna in the process. "It's so important to know what's being fished where, and in what amount in order to assess the health of fish stocks and to ensure we have fish for the future," Coulter continued.

"Hopefully, the results of our study will encourage stakeholders and policymakers to increase monitoring, share information and agree upon coordinated efforts like cutbacks, to foster the sustainability of tuna stocks."



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Another eye-opening stat is that industrial fishing now covers "at least 55 percent and possibly up to 90 percent of the global ocean." As a result, the authors write, "We have reached the spatial limit for tuna fisheries, with no new fishing grounds remaining, except as provided through species distributional changes due to climate change, which, however, may

also lead to loss of previous fishing grounds and catch potential. Thus, the continuation of tuna fisheries and their associated economic benefits at levels similar to the present or recent time periods is dependent on effective and restrictive long-term sustainable management of the fisheries and fleets exploiting these stocks and ecosystems."

In the end, the study doesn't appear to go so far as to say that tuna isn't sustainable, but it does politely (and in a lot more words) state that we won't ever know if tuna is sustainable if we don't have the right numbers. Now that we have the data, the next question becomes will fisheries heed its implicit advice?

Link: <https://www.foodandwine.com/news/tuna-fishing-consumption-sustainability>