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**HD** **Seaspiracy: sea monsters do exist — they're trawling our oceans to death**  
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**LP**

Netflix's 'shock documentary' should put you off industrial fishing practices, not eating fish, says the marine expert Charles Clover

It may not be the best idea to order fish and chips for your TV dinner as you sit down to watch

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Seaspiracy

,

[a new small-budget documentary on Netflix](#)

. The film, directed by 27-year-old Ali Tabrizi, explores the crisis in our seas and oceans and has been getting praise for doing what the BBC was criticised for failing to do in its gorgeous series

Blue Planet II

: naming the No 1 culprit as the global fishing industry.

The revulsion its young production team evidently feels about practices such as salmon farming — which takes huge amounts of wild fish from the ocean, boils them down and feeds them to lice-infested, caged salmon — should make every retailer rethink what it sells.

A "shock doc",

Seaspiracy

punches the viewer in the face with a relentless succession of facts, some new, some borrowed — and some a bit fishy. Its despairing solution is also flawed: a simple instruction of "Don't eat fish" may recruit a few vegans, but is ultimately not going to solve the ecological collapse of poorer countries caused by Far Eastern and European industrial fleets.

Only consumer pressure will make politicians close down the loopholes in international law and get these wildlife-slaughtering machines under control. For that reason,

Seaspiracy

is a must-watch. Overfishing is a disaster for the planet, but we can do something about it — while still enjoying the occasional seafood supper.

Official UN figures show that the size of the world's wild fish catches peaked in 1996. The stock of wild fish has been declining every year since then by about a million tons a year, according to researchers Daniel Pauly and Dirk Zeller in 2016. The UN said last year that 94 per cent of fish populations are fully exploited or overexploited. The truth could be even worse: data is supplied by fishing nations; there are concerns that China, for example, may not report entirely truthfully. Official figures also won't include subsistence fishers, discarded fish, recreational fishing and illegally caught fish.

This issue is about more than fish numbers and ocean ecosystems. A new paper by researchers including Jane Lubchenco, a science adviser to President Joe Biden, found that the practice of "bottom trawling" was producing carbon emissions equivalent to the entire global aviation sector. Essentially, the seabed is a giant carbon store; when it is disturbed by trawling, that carbon is released, with significant knock-on warming effects. This could be a watershed moment that — perhaps alongside

Seaspiracy

— could change what is acceptable in the sea.

The fishing industry has a more immediate human cost too. Tabrizi interviews the crews of Far Eastern fleets, many of whom are modern slaves. A growing number of observers in the Pacific — sent out to check catches and adherence to the rules — are being murdered. Few if any of the perpetrators have been caught. One of the most poignant moments in the film shows vast industrial vessels fishing off Africa being met by local fishermen begging for food, which their forebears used to catch.

The enormous web of subsidies that supports the industrial fishing fleets — in particular China's huge fleet of upwards of 12,000 vessels — must now be seen in a harsher light.

Seaspiracy

calculates that global fishing subsidies add up to about £25 billion — the same sum, in some estimates, needed to end world hunger.

But contrary to

Seaspiracy's

message, there is hope. According to researchers from the University of California, if we banned fishing in just 5 per cent of the ocean, global fish catches would be boosted by 20 per cent. Everyone benefits from creating protected, no-fishing areas — even fishermen.

As he gets on an Asian tuna boat a hundred miles off Africa with some heavily armed Liberian marines, Tabrizi says: "I don't see how enforcing sustainable fishing 100 miles out at sea is possible." Actually, it is, by closing the disgraceful exemption that some fishing vessels enjoy from the rule that all shipping must fit satellite beacons, so we know where they are and what they do. We should put video cameras on all boats in UK waters and lead by example.

Certification schemes can help the consumer make better choices, but the funding of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the Earth Island Institute, whose names you see on packets of supermarket fish, comes from the industry. Too often it calls the tune. The film points out that the MSC awarded the blue tick of sustainability to one Icelandic fishery that in a single month killed 900 seals, 269 harbour porpoises and 5,000 seabirds.

Yet there is sustainable seafood to be eaten, and the Marine Conservation Society's online Good Fish Guide is a good place to start. If in doubt, eat what is currently plentiful — which means North Sea plaice and haddock, hake and mussels. Do not eat UK-caught cod, bluefin tuna, eel, shark, skate and cuttlefish, as they are all overfished.

There are solutions. The future of fishing is small-scale, not industrial. Subsidies must go. The UK is signed up to protect 30 per cent of the ocean from the most damaging fishing practices by 2030, and has in fact bettered its share of the bargain.

It may not be perfect, but

## Seaspiracy

is a powerful advertisement against overfishing. Thank you, Tabrizi and co, for making it.

Charles Clover is executive director of the Blue Marine Foundation and the author of The End of the Line (Ebury), which was made into a film in 2009

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