

## **FISHING FOR THE FUTURE—FISHERY FACTS**

The world's fisheries are under more pressure than ever before. From 1950 to 1990, there was a fivefold increase in the world annual fish catch. The average yearly per-person fish consumption in the industrialized world (59 pounds) is three times that of people in the developing world (20 pounds). Fish demand remains high: An additional 15.5 million tons of fish will be required by 2010 just to maintain current rates of fish consumption. Today, 70 percent of the planet's marine stocks are fully exploited or overexploited.

The number of people fishing and practicing aquaculture worldwide has doubled since 1970. More than 21 million people are full-time fishers, and 200 million depend on fishing for their livelihood. Asia contains the vast majority of the world's fishers. In the early 1950s, developed countries took 80 percent of the world's fish catch. Today, they take only 36 percent of the catch, while developing countries take 64 percent.

The technology used to catch fish and the number of fish caught per fisher varies enormously. Modern fleets are the most environmentally destructive, as they use enhancements such as airplanes, radios, seafloor maps, and video sonar to track down fish schools. Once they have found the fish, these fleets use large nets to drag up not only the targeted fish but also coral, the seafloor, and around 27 million tons annually of "by-catch"—nonmarketable fish that are killed and thrown overboard.

To compensate for reduced wild fish stocks, more and more fish are being farmed. Nearly a third of all fish for food is harvested from aquaculture. For every 11 pounds of beef grown globally, there are now 4.5 pounds of farm-raised fish produced. Fish farming causes environmental destruction comparable to the replacement of rain forest with cattle ranches. About 11 pounds of wild ocean fish need to be caught to feed each pound of farmed species. Thailand, which has one of the biggest aquaculture industries, has lost half its mangrove forests due to shrimp farming. Densely stocked salmon farms in British Columbia, Canada, produce waste (including fertilizer, effluent, and fishmeal) equivalent to that generated by half a million people.

Despite these numbers, there is still hope for the world's fisheries. Fisheries can be restored through the adoption of sustainable fishing practices. With the proper incentives, fishers can be encouraged and rewarded in their effort to sustainably manage marine resources. For example, partnerships between local communities and scientists in the central islands of the Philippines resulted in the establishment of marine reserves to help manage overexploited fisheries. The establishment of no-fishing zones in the reserves has increased catches in adjacent fishing grounds. Another solution is to use the power of the market to encourage sustainable fishing practices. The Marine Stewardship Council together with the World Wildlife Federation and Unilever, one of the largest makers of fish products, has developed a certification process that includes a label telling consumers that fish products came from fisheries certified as sustainable.

**References:** *The New Internationalist* magazine issue 325, [www.newint.org](http://www.newint.org);  
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