

Scientists Rebut Claims of Oceanic Fish Extinction

Newspapers worldwide have reported on the gloom and doom prediction that ocean fish stocks worldwide will collapse by 2048. However, research conducted by scientists at the Pelagic Fisheries Research Program (PFRP) of the University of Hawaii's School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology and reported in the Dec. 15, 2006, issue of *Science*, refutes the claims that ocean ecosystems are on the brink of collapse.

The paper, "Biomass, size and trophic status of top level predators in the Pacific Ocean," is authored by four well-known fisheries scientists: John Sibert, the PFRP's Manager; John Hampton from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community; Pierre Kleiber of NOAA Fisheries; and Mark Maunder of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). Unlike previous studies, the paper analyzes all available data for Pacific tuna fisheries from 1950-2004 to estimate the impact on the Pacific fish population that fishing has had in the past 50 years. The analysis finds that the situation of different types of top predators such as tunas and sharks varies considerably.

As lead author Sibert notes, "Fishing impacts on an ecosystem are complex. They cannot be reduced to sound bytes. Management of ocean ecosystems in the 21st century will require comprehensive analysis and not the half-baked approaches used in some recent papers and so widely reported in media."

According to the paper, fishing for two important types of tuna—yellowfin and bigeye—is currently at the maximum sustainable level and are threatened by future growth of international fishing fleets. Based on this finding, scientists in two international regulatory commissions—the Western and Central



While some tuna species (like those pictured above at the Honolulu fish auction) are threatened by future growth of international fishing fleets, recent claims that ocean ecosystems are on the brink of collapse are half-baked and not credible, according to a comprehensive study by four well-known scientists in the Pacific.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

The Council is the policy-making organization for the management of fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ, generally 3–200 miles from shore) around the Territory of American Samoa, Territory of Guam, State of Hawaii, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and U.S. Pacific island possessions—an area of nearly 1.5 million square miles. The Council is tasked with maintaining opportunities for domestic fishing while preventing adverse impacts to stocks, habitat, protected species and ecosystem resources.

Pacific Fisheries Commission and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission—are recommending options to limit fishing for these species. These options include catch and fishing effort limits, time and area closures, and restrictions on the use of floating objects by the purse-seine fishery.

The new findings have been well-received by many fisheries researchers and managers. Maunder noted that "part of the reason our analysis has credibility in the fisheries scientific community is because we considered all the available data for these stocks rather than just picking and choosing the data that suits our cause, which is a stark contrast to several of the recent pessimistic fishery articles published in the journals *Science* and *Nature*."

More information on these findings is available by calling +1 (808) 956-4109 or visiting

http://imina.soest.hawaii.edu/PFRP/large_pelagics/large_pelagic_predators.html