

Overfishing

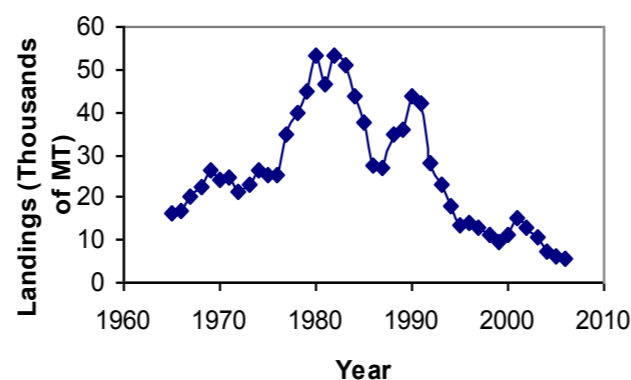
What is Overfishing?

Overfishing occurs when a population of fish are caught too much. At this point, fishing becomes un-sustainable. This means that the fish cannot reproduce and grow fast enough to keep up with the fishing pressure. Therefore, the population becomes smaller as fishing continues. Without any regulations, overfishing can cause populations of fish to go extinct. Generally, large slow-growing fish are more susceptible to overfishing than faster-growing smaller fish.

An Example of Overfishing

Northwest Atlantic Cod, once one of the most plentiful fish stocks in the ocean, is now virtually wiped out. For centuries the cod fishery had employed thousands of people and generated great wealth. However, in the late 1960s fishing pressure rose to record heights. Fishermen came from all over the world with huge boats and nets. With the help of local fishermen they caught a record 53,000 metric tons of cod in 1982. This intense pressure was not sustainable and the fishery soon collapsed. In 1992 the fishermen caught only 11,000 metric tons – a record low. The fishery was subsequently closed and all fishing of Northwest Atlantic cod was, and still is, banned in an attempt to revive the population.

Atlantic Cod Landings



This graph shows Atlantic Cod landings in metric tons from 1965 through 2006. The graph was made using data taken from http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/landings/annual_landings.html by Charles Perretti.

Why do we Overfish?

- 1. Fishermen are often unwilling to believe that the fish population is shrinking so they pressure the government to allow them to continue harvesting.**
- 2. Sometimes the government is unwilling to listen to their own scientists when they say a population is imperiled.**
- 3. The price of seafood is an important factor. A highly profitable fish, like the Bluefin Tuna, is overexploited because the fishermen are eager to make big profits.**
- 4. The government gives fishermen subsidies (totaling billions of dollars) to make fishing profitable when it otherwise wouldn't be.**



Fishing boat headed out to sea. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/>

How Can You Help Prevent Overfishing?

- 1. Don't eat overfished seafood.**
- 2. Write to your local government official and demand adequate management of our fish. Tell them you want to be able to catch a fish when you're thirty.**
- 3. Talk to your local seafood shop or restaurant owner and tell them not to sell threatened fish.**
- 4. Educate your parents on overfishing and tell them why they shouldn't buy overfished seafood.**

For more information visit:

<http://www3.blueocean.org/>
<http://overfishing.org/>
<http://www.oceanconservancy.org/>

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