

RADICAL

ENVIRONMENTALISTS

An over-hyped 2006 study raises the flag on marine fisheries, as many hardline environmental groups clamor for increasing marine protected areas. Are we facing a total catch-and-release fishery for all species in the future? Let's hope common sense and science prevail.

PLAYING GAMES WITH OUR MARINE RESOURCES

BY JIM HUTCHINSON, JR.

The big news in the world of marine fisheries on November 3 pertained to the total collapse of the world's fisheries. According to a new four-year study published in the U.S. journal *Science*, a group of researchers concluded that continued overfishing and coastal water quality degradation were leading to the disintegration of all marine life.

"If the long-term trend continues, all fish and seafood species are projected to collapse within my lifetime, by 2048," said Boris Worm of Dalhousie University in Canada, the lead author of the study.

All the major newspapers picked up on the study, the news talk radio stations were hyperactive with chatter, while all the top "news folks" from the morning wake-up shows were nearly teary-eyed over the latest report that "The world's fish and seafood could disappear by 2048."

The headlines, of course, were staggering.

One ABC news affiliate in Texas stated "Empty Oceans: No More Fish in 40 Years," while an NBC news outlet in Minnesota lead off with "Seafood Will Likely Be Extinct In 40 Years."

Over at Gannett-owned *USA Today*, which in today's "rip and read" world of newswire journalism provides the bulk of national newspaper headlines across the country, the big lead was "90% Of Ocean's Edible Species May Be Gone By 2048."

Before you trade in your trolling rods for a new set of golf clubs, take a look at some of the details from a 3-year-old news release from Worm and his fellow researchers. It's essentially the same body of experts, with the same doom and gloom synopsis of our world's fisheries.

In May of 2003, the Pew Fellows in Marine Conservation got together and signed off on a study that stated, "Ninety-percent of all the oceans' large fish - including tuna, marlin, swordfish, sharks, cod, halibut, flounder, and skates - have been taken from the sea since the early 1990s." This international body of "world-renowned marine conservation experts" released what was known as the Ocean Action Statement for Fisheries Conservation, which was then signed by almost 50 Pew Fellows in Marine Conservation.

First of all, you may ask what makes a Pew Fellow in Marine Conservation? The 2003 release states, "The Pew Marine Conservation Fellowships are the world's most prestigious awards honoring and investing in applied ocean conservation science and outreach. Five Pew Fellows are selected annually and receive \$150,000 each to carry out innovative, interdisciplinary projects addressing challenges facing our marine environment around the world."

A quick search of the Pew Charitable Trusts website indicates that some of those grant funds have increased in the past few years to more than \$240,000 per "fellow" and

that Pew Fellowship awards are now also being offered to journalists and media professionals as well. Marla Cone, for example, is a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times* and was one of the first journalists on the Associated Press newswire to break this year's gloomy report, leading off story by writing "All of the world's fishing stocks will collapse before mid-century, devastating food supplies." Ms. Cone herself became a Pew Fellow in 1999.

According to another Pew Fellow named Carl Safina, "Fishing has changed the oceans more than any other human activity. And most ordinary people directly affect the oceans by eating seafood." Safina received his fellowship in 1991.

In the 2003 study published in *Nature* magazine, Pew Fellow Ellen Pikitch, Director of Ocean Strategy for the Wildlife Conservation Society said, "This study confirms that there is no time left to quibble about whether the glass is half empty or half full. For the large fishes of the world's oceans, the glass is nearly completely drained. We have no time to waste if we are to have any chance of saving the oceans' wildlife."

"At this point, 29 of currently fished species were considered 'collapsed' in 2003, that is, their catches have declined by 90 percent or more," Mr. Worm said at the time.

Here we are now, three years later, rebuilding summer flounder stocks year in and year out, posting modern-day highs in terms of the fluke biomass, with a 10-year rebuilding plan implemented to place the fluke biomass at an all-time high of 204 million pounds, and Mr. Worm said there's really no point. Forget the 2010 targets; summer flounder will be extinct along with all other marine life by the middle of the 21st century.

Ransom Myers, a lead author of the 2003 study and a world-renowned fisheries biologist in his own right from Dalhousie University noted, "This isn't just about one species. The sustainability of fisheries is being severely compromised worldwide."

Nature magazine in 2003 revealed, "Myers/Worm research was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts." In fact, the 2003 study was paid for entirely by the Pew Charitable Trusts. While it made headlines, it certainly didn't ring as loudly as the 2006 study, which was funded instead by the National Science Foundation, the University of California-Berkeley and the University of California-Santa Barbara.

Of course, it doesn't take long to do a bit of "Googling" to trace down the money trail. Shankar Aswani is a Pew Fellow from UC of Santa Barbara, having received \$150,000 to implement a network of Marine Protected Areas in the western Pacific. Dr. Steven Gaines is another Pew grant recipient at Santa Barbara who has been using his monetary fellowship to help implement California's Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA).

Up at Berkeley? Forget about it - Pew city. They even accept Pew Fellowship grants at Berkeley coffee shops and juice bars; the stuff's better than actual currency with the patchouli set.

So while the latest report from the Myers/Worm clan indicates that all marine fish are headed towards extinction, the striped bass stock has grown to the highest mass in modern history, the summer flounder biomass grows larger every year with a current 30-year high, while other species like black drum, redfish, and croaker continue see a growing upward trend in stocks following years of aggressive conservation efforts.

Regrettably, success stories in fisheries management seemingly have no place in many of today's privately funded research studies. The environment really is for sale, except instead of big oil companies and corporate raiders doing the brokering as many environmental idealists had often railed against, it appears to some that science and

journalism are now getting into the business of environmental exploitation.

It's no coincidence that the Worm report of November 3 has been released when it was. Following the November 7 elections, House members returned to Washington and immediately resumed discussions on the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The bankers at Pew openly stated that any recipient who came out in favor of the House Magnuson bill introduced by Rep. Richard Pombo, or who fought for the removal of hardline overfishing language or aims to add flexibility to the fisheries management process, will be cut off from future Pew funding.

With media scribes calling for the collapse of our global fisheries, and the fellows from Pew keeping a lid on both their heartfelt opinions and their piggy banks, maybe you should dust off those clubs and start working on your short game.

(Opinions and grant offers can be emailed directly to jhutchinson@thefisherman.com)



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