

The Fillet Line

News from the West Coast Seafood Processors Association
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WEST COAST FISHERIES MANAGERS DOING THE RIGHT THING

A new report from a distinguished group of 21 fisheries and ecosystem scientists shows that problems with some world fisheries are not reflected in Oregon, Washington, and California.

“Rebuilding Global Fisheries,” published in the July 31, 2009, edition of *Science*, critically examined the status of fisheries in several large marine ecosystems, including the California Current ecosystem that runs along the U.S. West Coast. As stated in the study, “only in the California Current and in New Zealand are current exploitation rates predicted to achieve a conservation target of less than 10 percent of stocks collapsed.” That finding puts West Coast stocks on a firmer footing than Alaskan stocks, which are often held to be the best managed in the world.

“The members of the West Coast Seafood Processors Association work with the Pacific Fishery Management Council and the state fish and wildlife agencies to use the best scientific information available to manage our fisheries,” said Rod Moore, executive director of WCSPA. “This latest study from 21 well-known scientists demonstrates that we are doing what is necessary to provide healthy and sustainable West Coast seafood to the American consumer while conserving our valuable fish stocks.”

Although some fisheries - especially in Europe and in developing countries - have a long way to go to reach appropriate biomass levels and exploitation rates, the California Current ecosystem is one in which recent rebuilding efforts have been successful. In the early years of the Pacific groundfish fishery - the one examined by the authors - a typical “fishing down” pattern occurred in which biomass was reduced. Over time, as more conservative management practices and gear modifications have been adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council at the urging of West Coast processors and fishermen, biomass has shown a general increase and exploitation rates have been reduced. These are good fisheries management strategies, ones the authors recommend to conserve fish stocks and produce greater biological and economic yields over the long term.

“It is often difficult to accept the bitter medicine of catch reductions, especially in these stressful economic times,” Moore said. “However, we have learned that doing things right means we are all better off in the future.

“In the last 15 years, we have seen the seafood industry promote gear changes to reduce bycatch of sensitive species, depth-based closed areas to allow harvest of healthy stocks while protecting weak ones, time-varying changes in allowable catch to minimize discards, and restricted areas to protect bottom habitat. By working with scientists and fisheries managers, we have shown that conservation can work.”

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