

Pew/Oceana's latest exercise in crepe hanging

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"The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has today released its report on the state of world fisheries and aquaculture. The flagship SOFIA report, considered a check-up on the world's fish supplies, has confirmed an alarming trend over the years in falling fish stocks, the result of vast overfishing on a global scale. Oceana regrets the new findings, which place overfished and fully-fished stocks at 89.5% in 2016, compared to around 62-68% in 2000." (From a Pew/Oceana press release dated July 7, 2016)

Hard as it is to imagine, Pew/Oceana's latest "the sky is falling" attempt at mobilizing the forces of righteousness to avoid the end of the world's oceans via rampant overfishing took some startling liberties in crafting their latest call to arms (i.e. *make a donation to Oceana*). In their attempt to convince potential donors that oceanic doom and gloom had already arrived, the people at Pew/Oceana tried to conflate "overfished" and "fully fished" fish stocks, illogically putting them in the same category, allowing their use of the alarming seeming (to the average unsophisticated reader) 89.5% figure. *Get out the checkbooks, folks!* But, with a nod to Paul Harvey, how about the rest of the story?

From the FAO report (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5555e.pdf>) on Pg. 5, "*fully fished stocks accounted for 58.1 percent (of the world's capture fisheries) and underfished stocks 10.5 percent.*" In other words, just under 70% of the world's fish stocks aren't overfished and just over 30% are. But that's nowhere nearly as dismal-sounding as Pew/Oceana's almost 90% either being overfished or not underfished – though it's certainly the way that any group that isn't crisis-oriented would present the data.

Consider the FAO figures in a different context. Obviously there are three classes of drivers; drivers who drive below the speed limit, drivers who drive at the speed limit and drivers who drive over the speed limit. Let's assume that 10.5% of drivers are in the first group, 58.1% are in the second and 31.4% are in the third. And then let's assume that you wanted to make it appear as if speeding was as much of a problem as possible. Would you write that just under 70% of drivers drove at or below the speed limit or that almost 90% of drivers drove at or above the speed limit? Both are correct, but in the first case the focus is on drivers who are operating their vehicles lawfully and in the second the focus has been shifted to drivers who are speeding.

Is there any difference between the machinations that the people at Pew/Oceana are using to argue that the world's fisheries are in really bad shape due to fishing/overfishing and those of some other group using a different spin based on the same illogical logic ?

It should come as a surprise to no one that with a burgeoning world population of well over seven billion people – in 2000 it was 6.1 billion, in 2016 it was 7.4 billion - there's a tremendous and increasing demand for protein, that a significant part of that protein comes from the world's oceans, and that sustainably harvested wild fish and shellfish provide one of the most environmentally benign protein sources. Bearing in mind that "fully fished" stocks are sustainable (i.e. they can be harvested at that level *ad infinitum*), it seems almost impossible to understand how the Pew/Oceana people could lump overharvested and sustainably harvested stocks together except for the fact that proclaiming that almost 90% of fish stocks are being fully fished or overfished is going to get a lot more attention than that 30% of fish stocks are being overfished.

Or perhaps the bottom line is they are anti-fishing, whether it's sustainable fishing or not.

If the FAO is anywhere near correct with their figures, having 30% of the world's fish stocks overfished seems enough reason for a continuing focus on reducing it. Evidently the people at Pew/Oceana think that lily needs a few more layers of gold, but that seems a pretty shoddy way of getting it. It seems that they must also have an awfully low opinion of the level of comprehension of the people who pay any attention to their Chicken Little pronouncements, but that's a whole 'nother story.

And always keep in mind that fisheries will be classified as "overfished" if there aren't enough fish for any reason, as in the water has become too warm. "Overfishing" can be taking place in a fishery with landings far below what the stock in a healthy environment would support. This is a misnomer whose use is perpetuated by people and organizations with interests that extend only to controlling – or eliminating – fishing, an effective way of diverting attention away from a whole bunch of environmental affronts inflicted on our marine and fresh waters.

Finally, I can't close without mentioning that last year 91% of federally managed U.S. fish stocks were not being overfished. Adopting the Pew/Oceana analytical framework, I guess that would become something along the lines of "*in the United States 100% of all fish stocks are either overfished or are being fished sustainably.*" Now that's something to keep you awake at night, isn't it?