Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing

Nils Stolpe
FishNet USA
njsha@voicenet.com

Even if the mean trophic level of landings was higher earlier on (which in our view is not proven), this does not necessarily reflect "fishing down the food web," because overall landings have increased substantially in recent decades, contrary to what was stated in the report.... the situation of marine fisheries is complex , and shows wide regional variation. Oversimplifying a key issue like this could inhibit local research on human impacts on marine food chains that should not be confined to impacts of the fishing industry. (Caddy, J.F., J. Csirke, S. M. Garcia and R. J. R. Grainger/How Pervasive Is "Fishing Down Marine Food Webs"?/Science/20 November 1998)

June 6, 2006

NOTE: Because of a software problem. some of the links do not work. If clicking on a URL doesn't take you to the proper page, copy and pasteit into your browser window.

The sky is falling (Part 1):

"Scientists also tell us that the most immediate threat to ocean health is posed by the short-sighted practices of industrial scale commercial fishing…. Oceana should also seek changes in the way this agency manages our oceans. If this agency has a consistently bad track record, then we need to reform the agency itself." Andy Sharpless (Chief Executive Officer of Pew recipient Oceana)

Summary: Abetted by members of the broadcast and print media who are unfamiliar with either fisheries or ocean issues at anything beyond the "advanced layman" level, a group of foundation funded Marine Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (MENGOs) have devoted tens of millions of dollars to convincing the public that the coastal waters of the United States are facing an imminent crisis brought about by a rapacious fishing industry running roughshod over a conflict-crippled federal fisheries management system. Availing ourselves of data going back to 1950, we have found that neither the size nor the makeup of the domestic commercial fisheries landings have changed notably in over half a century. In 1950 the total landings of the domestic commercial fishing fleet in the continental U.S. were 1.218 million tons. In 2004 they were 1.186 million tons. That's a decrease of only 3%.

Of the 25 largest fisheries in the U.S. in 1950, thirteen are still there in 2004. Of the remaining twelve, two declined because their processing operations relocated abroad, two aren't being fully utilized, four were/are casualties of environmental degradation in at least parts of their range; two are in the process of recovering from previous overfishing, and one has fell victim to the Florida net ban . Only two of the twenty-five largest fisheries in the U.S. in 1950 are still being overfished.

Some readers will remember Clara Peller asking "where's the beef?" Looking at these figures, we have to modify her question - but not her incredulity - by asking "where's the crisis?"

Reading – and believing - what Mr. Sharpless from Pew/Oceana wrote above, one would have to assume that the health of our oceans has been on a extended downward slide and that industrial scale commercial fishing abetted by a compromised federal management regime is to blame.

Of course, to be believable all of that doom and gloom should be accompanied by some tangible indicator of how bad things have become, something easily understandable that would convince us that corporate fishing boats and ineffectual managers were responsible for ocean productivity being precariously perched on the edge of a precipice. If things are that bad, it must surely be reflected in what is being caught by those rapacious fishermen, mustn't it? And if things are that bad today, they would surely have had to have been better in the past. We couldn't have been teetering on the edge of that precipice for over half a century, could we?

Fishing a half a century ago

So what about the good old days? Consider commercial fishing 50 or so years ago, decades before the Magnuson Act became law. Back then, the regulations were fairly easy to understand because there were so few of them.

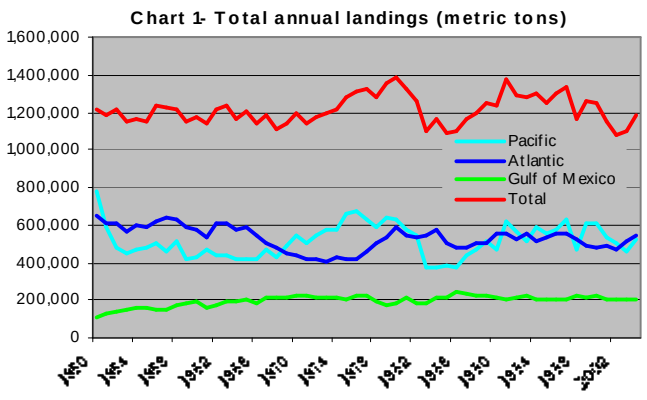
If you had a boat and you wanted to fish for something, you bought the right gear – or something approaching the right gear, or something that you thought might catch whatever *it was you wanted* to catch – and you had at it.

If you decided you wanted to fish and sell your catch and didn't have a boat, you bought one. If you didn't have the right boat, you modified yours or you bought another one. You left port when you wanted to, you returned to port when you wanted to, you caught what you wanted to however you wanted to catch it, **you fished w**ith as many crewmen as you thought you needed, you kept the fish you wanted to keep, you handled them on board the w**ay you wanted to handle them,** and you sold them to whoever you wanted to sell them to. Reporting requirements, if they existed at all, were rudimentary. The idea of being forced to take a government observer on a trip or to install some kind of tracking system so that "big brother" knew what you were catching, where/when you were fishing, or whether you were at the dock or not would have been considered somewhere between excessively ludicrous and extremely un-American.

The argument seems to be that regulations weren't necessary to control commercial fishing back then. That because of the lack of modern technological innovations, fishing was mostly an artisanal undertaking that has, alas, been supplanted with the high tech "industrial scale" fishing. (At this point we won't go into the cynical use by the anti-fishing groups of the deep and growing antipathy of the average person to "corporate" America, but that's on the FishNet agenda for the near future.)

Small numbers of fishermen in small boats using ineffectual gear in near-shore waters supposedly had negligible impacts on the fish stocks, on the ocean habitat or on much of anything else. Our ocean waters, we are to believe, resembled a Rousseauian paradise back then.

Then technology, with the enthusiastic encouragement of corporate greed, allegedly took over. We're supposed to think – with the help of emotionally loaded rhetoric as exemplified by the various "sky is falling" quotes that we've included in this issue – that the quaint local fishermen in their colorful native attire, with their inefficient, low impact fishing methods (think a cross between Spencer Tracy in *Captains Courageous* and the locals crafting handicrafts for and serving buffets to ecotourists in Costa Rica) had no impact on the fish stocks. They were replaced by the big boats and the big nets and the big investments, all requiring unfettered harvesting with no thought to tomorrow, and it's been downhill ever since. Hence the alleged crisis.



Nils E. Stolpe
njsha@voicenet.com

The sky is falling (Part 2)

While improvements have been made in some fisheries, more changes will be needed to decrease the waste of valuable resources and damage to vulnerable species. (Pew recipient Ransom) Myers Lab website.

Fishing regulations today – cheaper by the dozen?

Today in fishery after fishery there aren't any significant variables - or insignificant ones, it seems - that aren't regulated by government edict. While the listing isn't all-inclusive, consider the following commercial fishing restrictions imposed under federal and/or state and/or regional management in U.S. and international waters (these aren't requirements of every Fishery Management Plan, but they are all – always in combination – in place in one or more):

Who is allowed to fish:
- Limited entry is in place in every important commercial fishery.
- New entrants must acquire an existing permit to participate in that fishery
- In some commercial fisheries you can only inherit a permit from a relative.
- There are restrictions on who can own a permit.
- Some permits can only be purchased in company with other permits.
- Some permits can't be transferred or sold.

The vessels allowed in particular fisheries:
- There are maximum size limits on vessels allowed.
- There are maximum horsepower limits on vessels allowed.
- There are limits on the size and horsepower of vessels replacing existing vessels.
- There are limits on the degree of modification allowed for existing vessels.

The gear (nets, hooks, etc.) used in particular fisheries:
- There are requirements for the specific type of gear allowed.
- There are limits on the amount of gear (size of nets, number of hooks, number of dredges/ vessel, etc.) allowed.
- There are limits on the size of gear (mesh of nets, size of hooks, width of dredges, etc.) allowed.
- There are design/construction requirements for the gear used.
- There are requirements to have specified non-fishing gear on board.

The crew allowed in particular fisheries:
- There are limits on the size of crews.
- There are residency requirements for crewmembers.
- There are requirements that crewmembers be certified in particular conservation techniques.

Where/when fishing is allowed:
- Some areas are permanently closed to commercial harvesting.
- Some areas are seasonally closed to commercial harvesting.
- Some areas are temporarily, and on short notice, closed to commercial harvesting.
- Some areas are closed to commercial harvesting using a particular kind of gear.
- Some areas are closed to passage of commercial vessels with certain gear on board in a "ready to fish" condition.
- Particular gear can't be set within various distances from shore or from certain structures in particular fisheries.

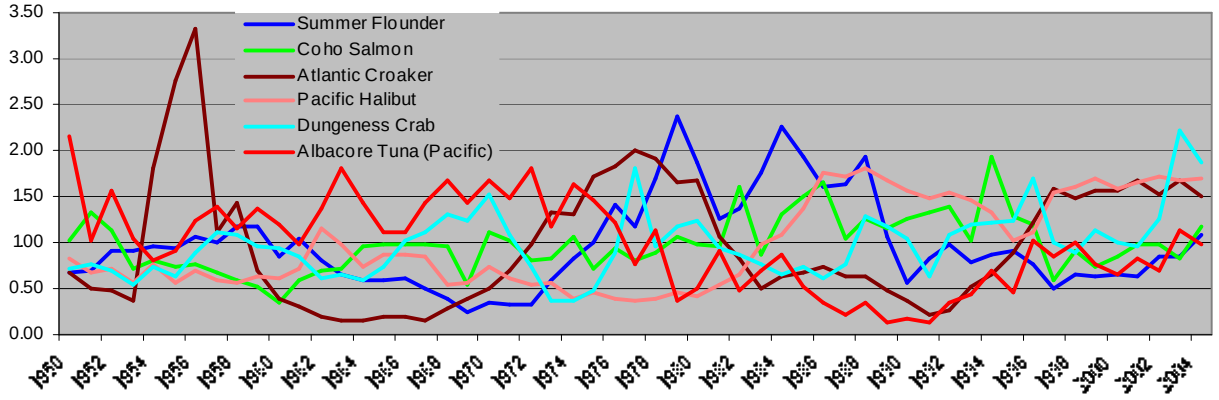
Which fish are harvested:
- There are size limits.
- There are total catch limits.
- There are bycatch limits of particular species.
- The possession of some species is prohibited.
- The catch may only be sold to permitted dealers.
- There are requirements to release all females of particular species caught.
- There are requirements to mark then release egg bearing females of particular species caught.
- There are requirements to release marked females of particular species caught.
- There are requirements preventing the transfer of fish from vessel to vessel.

How the fish are harvested:
- There are requirements on how gear may be fished (duration of sets, length of tows, etc.)
- Gear must be attended at all times when being used.

How the fish are handled on board:
- Fish may not be cut or processed on board.

Chart 2 - Annual catch of various species as a multiple of that species' average annual catch 1950 to 2004

(no landings listed for Pacific albacore tuna prior to 1982)



Nils E. Stolpe
njsha@voicenet.com

The sky is falling (Part 3)

"Having exhausted catches of larger, longer-lived species (e.g., tuna, cod, snapper), fishing fleets are increasingly concentrating on catching smaller, shorter-lived, plankton-eating species (e.g., squid, mackerel and sardines, and invertebrates such as oysters, mussels, and shrimp), which are nearer the bottom of the food chain." Pew Seaweb website

Fish must be stowed on board in a prescribed manner.
Fish must be stowed in standardized containers while on board.
"Tags" must be affixed to the catch when it is brought aboard.

How government intrudes into a fisherman's workday:

Fishermen must file regular reports on areas fished, level of catch and level of bycatch.
Vessels are required to carry government observers.
Vessels are required to carry satellite tracking devices.
Electronic reporting by the harvester and by the buyer is required.
A captain must provide notification before leaving the dock.
A captain must provide notification before returning to the dock.
Fish may only be sold to "licensed" buyers.

This undoubtedly incomplete listing is only of the fisheries management requirements. There are also safety, navigational and national security requirements imposed by the U.S. Coastguard, product sanitation requirements imposed by state and federal health agencies, and crew documentation requirements imposed by the federal Department of Immigration and Naturalization.

Quite a change, isn't it? Imagine Spencer Tracy, Freddy Bartholemew and Micky Rooney sitting down after an exhausting day of fishing to watch Lionel Barrymore fill out page after page of government reports. Or the *We're Here* being boarded by the Coast Guard and turned inside out in a search for illegal lobsters, cod that are too small or hooks that are shaped wrong. Unless you're a particular type of career bureaucrat, the idea should be completely unsettling, but the recent years' barrage of "ocean crisis" rhetoric has made it acceptable.

For the purposes of this discussion, we assumed that all of these restrictions, though ineffectual, are necessitated by the short-sighted rapaciousness of today's fishermen (who are nothing like those played by Spencer, Freddy, Micky and Lionel back in 1937). This being the case, we also assumed that there were blatant indications of the many supposed failings of today's fishermen and fisheries managers.

Considering all of the *strum und drang* that has been the bread and butter of the anti-fishing forces over the last decade, we expected to see dramatic differences in what was caught over the last three generations. With the cumulative impacts of new technology, new boats, the supposed development of the "rape and pillage" mentality, rampant cheating, overfishing and bycatch that we've heard about incessantly, we expected that somewhere, somehow, landings would have shown definite trends indicative of the supposed fisheries/oceans crisis. We never dreamed that, once we allowed for the advent of several huge new fisheries in Alaska, domestic commercial landings would be just about the same today (or more specifically, in 2004) as they were in 1950. If they were, why would all of that foundation money be pouring into the coffers of those ENGOS that were seemingly created to make life miserable for commercial fishermen while saving them from themselves and their supposed self-destructive obsession with profits. **(SEE Chart 1)**.

The most obvious place to look for evidence that the oceans are being emptied or ruined or whatever the currently fashionable anti-fishing concerns are would be commercial landings. Accordingly, we went to the Commercial Fishing database on the NMFS website (http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st1/commercial/landings/annual_landings.html) and looked at the total commercial landings from the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts from 1950 to 2004, the first and last years for which landings data are available available (We used commercial landings data because it's generally agreed that they are among the most accurate sources of information dealing with fisheries. While they don't provide an actual estimate of the fish in the water, over time they provide an accurate picture of resource trends as long as other relevant factors are allowed for.)

In these fifty-five years we went from virtually unfettered fishing pre-Magnuson to over three decades of what the foundation-funded activists consider "conflict compromised," and what everyone else considers increasingly restrictive, federal management.* (For reasons detailed below, we left out Alaskan landings and those of Pacific Sardines and Atlantic/Gulf Menhaden.)

Aggregate landings the same then and now

To our considerable surprise, we didn't see anything that would indicate any trends at all. In the years from 1950 to 1975 the average annual landings for the United States were 1.185 million metric tons. In the post-Magnuson years from

The landings of Atlantic menhaden weren't included in the total catch from the Atlantic and Gulf coasts because they are an "industrial fish" that are caught in huge quantities determined by the market place (and in recent years, by political rather than their actual availability). For example, in the period examined, Atlantic menhaden landings comprised from about 25% to almost 50% of the total Atlantic landings. Their inclusion would have skewed the total landings significantly.

The landings of Pacific sardines weren't included in the total Pacific catch because 1950 was the last year during which they were available in significant numbers. In 1950 they made up almost one-third of the total catch. In 1952, because of a natural population cycle (possibly exacerbated by fishing) their populations had crashed and they made up less that 1% of the total landings. Landings declined to essentially zero in the mid to late seventies and are less than 20% of total landings today.

Alaskan landings weren't included because they have become so great, increasing by a factor of ten from 1950 to present, that if they were they would have concealed trends – or the lack of trends – in the fisheries in the "lower 48."

Nils E. Stolpe
njsha@voicenet.com

The sky is falling (Part 4)

"In recent years, fish populations around the world, including popular restaurant species, have declined dramatically. One reason is overfishing — fishing faster than a population can replenish itself." (Pew recipient) *NRDC Website*

Table #1 - 25 species with the greatest landings (from highest to lowest) in 1950, 1979 and 2004 ("SEAWEED, KELP" and "FINFISHES, UNC BAIT AND ANIMAL FOOD" were eliminated) The species highlighted in blue were in the top 25 in all three groups, in grey in two.

1950	1975	2004
MENHADEN, ATLANTIC	MENHADEN, ATLANTIC	POLLOCK, WALLEYE
SARDINE, PACIFIC	ANCHOVIES	MENHADEN, ATLANTIC
HERRING, ATLANTIC	TUNA, YELLOWFIN	COD, PACIFIC
REDFISH OR OCEAN PERCH	SHRIMP, MARINE, OTHER	HAKE, PACIFIC (WHITING)
SHRIMP, MARINE, OTHER	CRAB, BLUE	SALMON, PINK
TUNA, YELLOWFIN	SHRIMP, PENAEID	SALMON, SOCKEYE
HADDOCK	CRAB, KING	SARDINE, PACIFIC
JACK MACKEREL	CLAM, ATLANTIC SURF	HERRING, ATLANTIC
TUNA, SKIPJACK	HERRING, ATLANTIC	CRAB, BLUE
CRAB, BLUE	TUNA, SKIPJACK	SOLE, YELLOWFIN
SALMON, SOCKEYE	SALMON, PINK	SHRIMP, WHITE
SALMON, PINK	COD, ATLANTIC	SHRIMP, BROWN
SALMON, CHUM	SALMON, SOCKEYE	MACKEREL, ATLANTIC
TUNA, ALBACORE	HERRING, SEA	ATKA MACKEREL
OYSTER, EASTERN	TUNA, ALBACORE	SALMON, CHUM
HAKE, SILVER	OYSTER, EASTERN	LOBSTER, AMERICAN
COD, ATLANTIC	CRAB, SNOW/TANNER	SQUID, CALIFORNIA MARKET
ALEWIFE	FLOUNDER, YELLOWTAIL	HALIBUT, PACIFIC
SOLES	HAKE, SILVER	HERRING, PACIFIC
SALMON, COHO	SHRIMP, OCEAN	CRAB, DUNGENESS
HALIBUT, PACIFIC	JACK MACKEREL	SOLE, ROCK
SALMON, CHINOOK	ROCKFISHES	SCALLOP, SEA
SCUPS OR PORGIES	SALMON, CHUM	CLAM, ATLANTIC SURF
MULLET, STRIPED (LIZA)	BONITO, ATLANTIC	SKATES
MACKEREL (SCOMBER)	REDFISH OR OCEAN PERCH	SQUID, NORTHERN SHORTFIN
CRAB, DUNGENESS	MULLET, STRIPED (LIZA)	SABLEFISH

1976 onward the average annual landings were 1.236 million metric tons. In the earlier period the annual catch ranged from 1.111 million tons to 1.283 million tons. In the post-Magnuson period the range was from 1.080 million tons to 1.390 million tons. In the Atlantic the landings were a little bit down and in the Gulf and Pacific they were a little bit up.

In the lower forty-eight states the total commercial landings have been what is difficult to describe as anything but surprisingly stable for the last half a century. They started at 1.218 million pounds and finished at 1.186 million pounds. That's a 3% difference (and a difference in large part accounted for by Pacific sardine landings and the fact that in the early 1950s NMFS credited significant Atlantic herring landings to the Pacific).

No "fishing down the food chain"

But how much variation is there within the total landings? The doom and gloom ENGOS would have us believe that we've "fished down" the ocean ecosystem, in recent years replacing high value species that inhabit the upper reaches of the food chain with those less valuable species that are lower down. From what we can understand of this supposed universal trend in the world's fisheries, an example would be on the order of catching menhaden rather than tuna. To see how valid this assertion was, we looked at the landings of the top 25 species (in metric tons landed) in 1950, 1975 and 2004. We included all species of fish and shellfish, leaving out only the "SEAWEED, KELP" and the "FINFISHES, UNC BAIT AND ANIMAL FOOD" categories **(see Table 1).**

Thirteen fisheries that were in the top 25 in 1950 remained there in 2004. Of the remaining twelve, the two tuna fisheres declined because the tuna processing operations relocated abroad; the alewife, Eastern oyster, coho salmon and chinhook salmon fisheries were/are all casualties of environmental degradation in at least parts of their range; silver hake, and haddock are recovering from previous overfishing (the fisheries are still classified as overfished but overfishing is no longer occuring); jack mackerel are considered underutilized and redfish (ocean perch) are not overfished and are for the most part uncatchable with the gear restrictions rnow equired by the multispecies FMP; and the mullet fishery was almost eliminated by the Florida net ban. Only two of the twenty-five largest U.S. fisheries in 1950, Atlantic cod and scup, are no longer in the top twenty-five because they were and still are being overfished.

Of those that made it to the top twenty-five since 1950, the squid fisheries are a reflection of increased export opportunities and the increased landings in the American lobster and sea scallop fisheries are a function of high levels of natural production. The fishermen in them are and have been taking advantage of this increased production and/or increased market opportunities. The Alaskan cod, Pollock and whiting fisheries were only being developed in the late 1980s. No one has been forced to fish for sea scallops, lobster, squid or the three Alaskan species because there's nothing else to catch, they're in those fisheries because they can make money in them.

"Fishing down the food chain" can't be demonstrated - or even implied - by these landings data. In 1950 and 1975 there were five fisheries in which the target species were at the bottom, in 2004 there were four. The three largest fisheries in 1950 were for species at the bottom of the food chain. In 2004 only the second largest fishery was.

Of course, as the data demonstrate, there are fisheries with higher prior landings, and their declines in some cases are due, at least in part, to too much fishing pressure. But there are only two of them out of a total of twenty-five.

Table #2 - % Change in landings of various species from 1950 to 2005

FISHERY	1950	2004	% CHANGE
CLAM, ATLANTIC SURF	3,512	28,327	807%
MACKEREL, ATLANTIC	10,021	55,059	549%
LOBSTER, AMERICAN	10,523	40,091	381%
SALMON, PINK	38,907	135,155	347%
SCALLOP, SEA	9,101	29,327	322%
CRAB, DUNGENESS	12,669	32,775	259%
CROAKER, ATLANTIC	5,223	11,582	222%
HALIBUT, PACIFIC	17,617	35,906	204%
FLOUNDER, SUMMER	5,124	8,250	161%
SALMON, CHUM	33,843	50,970	151%
CRAB, BLUE	54,135	75,390	139%
SALMON, COHO	18,246	21,013	115%
FLOUNDER, YELLOWTAIL	10,938	7,235	66%
HERRING, ATLANTIC	164,356	85,442	52%
TUNA, ALBACORE	32,865	14,949	45%
OYSTER, EASTERN	30,932	12,192	39%
HAKE, SILVER	30,542	8,572	28%
COD, ATLANTIC	26,078	7,289	28%
SCUPS OR PORGIES	16,115	4,101	25%
HADDOCK	71,922	8,242	11%

We then looked in greater detail at annual commercial landings for five other species from both coasts **(SEE Chart 2).** Our chief selection criterion was the avoidance of the handful of species that the anti-fishing ENGOS have adopted in their campaign to "reform fisheries." While none that we selected are among the most valuable or the largest in any region, they all represent significant fisheries. While it would be difficult to define what an "average" commercial fishery might be, any of these could fill the bill. They've all been in existence for over half a century and each depends on well-developed markets.

We found that the landings in each of them, which have been trending slightly upward for all but albacore tuna for the last 54 years, varied from under half to about double the average in that period. The

Nils E. Stolpe
njsha@voicenet.com

The sky is falling (Part 5)

"The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) continues to tout a downward trend in the number of stocks that are overfished or experiencing overfishing, these improvements have primarily been due to NMFS finessing the data presented in its annual report to Congress on the status of fish stocks." (Pew recipient) Marine Fish Conservation Network press release.

---

landings for all of them bounce around quite a bit, but going by the data, these fisheries obviously aren't being threatened by corporate greed or government mismanagement or anything else, and neither is the habitat they depend upon. And, while the folks who have built their careers and their budgets around the "fisheries in crisis" myth would be loath to admit it, there are many more like them.

Populations go up and populations go down

We then compared landings in 1950 and in 2004 of the above 5 species plus 15 more. As shown in **Table 2**, some increased or decreased dramatically, some increased or decreased slightly, and one remained essentially the same. Haddock landings in 2004 were 11% of what they were in 1950, surf clam landings were 807% greater, yellowtrail flounder decreased by 34% and coho salmon increased by 15%.

But as the total landings for the period show, everything balanced out nationally and everything balanced out regionally. We're catching a lot more of some species than we were, a lot less of others, some new fisheries have developed, some old ones have disappeared, and some yielded about the same harvest in 2004 that they did in 1950.

How do you create a crisis?

Consider the landings of Atlantic croaker from 1953 to 1962 or from 1977 to 1984 or of Pacific halibut for the two decades after 1962 **(see Chart 3)**. Or any of the other protracted declines exhibited in most fisheries. Had there been foundation dollars around to pay for it back then, and had there then been a reason to demonize commercial fishermen, it would have been easy to make the arguments while they were trending downwards that the species had been irrevocably overfished, that the ocean habitat that it depended upon had been destroyed, or that the management system had failed.

Subsequent increased landings prove that wasn't the case **(see Chart 4)**. The ups and downs are nothing more than expected though unpredictable variations that the system (natural and bureaucratic and economic) has demonstrably been able to accommodate.

A stable commercial fishery

We had a stable commercial fishery with landings of about one and a quarter million metric tons a year before fish finders, GPS, synthetic twine, powerful engines, "corporate" fleets, supposed habitat destruction and an annual half a billion dollar fisheries management budget. And we have a stable commercial fishery at about one and a quarter million metric tons today as well. Landings of particular species go up and down, but that's to be expected. Fluctuations in landings were, are and will continue to be a part of commercial fishing, being influenced by natural populations, by market changes and in recent years by imprecision in management.

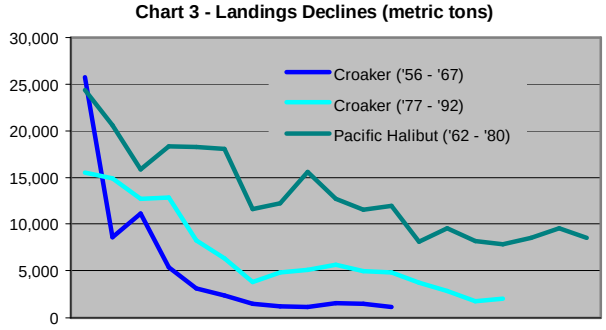
So where's the crisis in our fisheries that multi-billion dollar "charitable" foundations, the ENGOs they support and the academics on their dole have been promoting for the last decade? Where are the catastrophic results of the out-of-control management system compromised by fishing industry conflicts of interest? How about the food chain getting fished down or around or whatever? Or the inarguable proof from tens of millions of dollars worth of "Chicken Little" gloom-and-doom research (we use the term with reservation) grants?

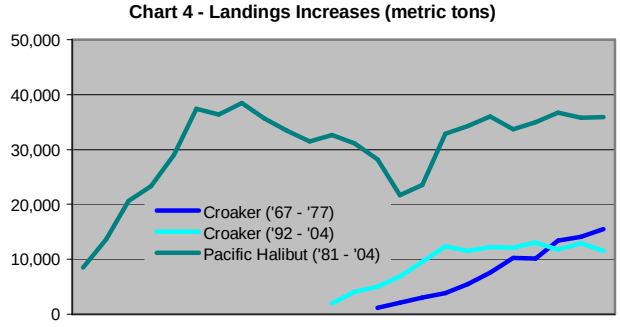
The crisis surely isn't apparent in the total commercial landings over the last 50+ years. Nor is it apparent in the recreational fishing landings, which are generally increasing (see *Who, us? An examination of who's catching what in the world of fishing* at http://www.fishingnj.org/netusa26.html).

Can we know all there is to know about the status of every separate stock?

The antis enthusiastically point out that NMFS' knowledge of the status of the stocks managed under the Magnuson Act is woefully inadequate because the agency knows so little about so few of them. When we look at NMFS' annual report to Congress (http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/domes_fish/StatusoFisheries/2006/FirstQuarter/TableA_B.pdf), however, we see that while the status of all of the stocks that support major fisheries are known, information is still lacking on some of those that don't. This includes 68 salmon stocks, 50 Pacific groundfish stocks and 44 Gulf and Caribbean reef fish stocks. While these stocks - and the fisheries that depend on them - should definitely not be ignored, the various fisheries management agencies together don't possess the resources to analyze and monitor the condition of all of them. Yet when it comes to furthering their anti-fishing agenda, these activists are willing to accord a lack of knowledge of the status of the Gulf of Mexico wenchman, the Lower River Hatchery spring chinhook salmon and the Pacific dwarf-red rockfish the same importance as a lack of knowledge of the cod or king crab or surf clam.

With all due respect to the fishermen – recreational or commercial – who catch wenchmen in the Gulf, dwarf-red rockfish off California or Chinook salmon that were spawned in the Lower River hatchery, NMFS does have a handle on the status of our major recreational and commercial species, be-





Nils E. Stolpe
njsha@voicenet.com

The sky is falling (Part 6)

"If fishing is doing what we say, then essentially, there is no tomorrow for them. We can expect that in a few decades there will be no fish left." (Pew recipient) D. Pauly in The Globe and Mai1, 10/29/2005

cause those are the important ones. With a limited budget, and with ever-increasing demands from the activists for more enforcement, bureaucracy and surveillance (plus defending against all of those "conservationist" law suits), should the agency be expected to know the status of every one of several hundred separate stocks? Evidently, in the distorted world of these foundation-funded activists, that would be a definite yes. But we've yet to see a Pew grant for better on-the-water science that would fill the data gaps in dealing with these minor stocks.

So where's the crisis?

If, as Dr. Pauly and his benefactors insist, we'll be running out of fish in the near future, if the U.S. is the epicenter of poor management and corporate greed in the fishing world, then where's the evidence as reflected in U.S. landings? How is it that in the last half a century we've gone from an essentially low tech and environmentally benign type of fishing to one that, if you believe all of the anti-fishing hyperbole, was spawned in the third circle of Dante's Inferno, and yet we're still catching about the same tonnage of fish, and about the same species mix as well?

There are fisheries that are in bad shape today, just as there were fisheries that were in bad shape 50 years ago. And, no matter what is done, there will be fisheries that are in bad shape 50 years from now. Just as there were, there are and there will be fisheries in good shape. That's the nature of fishing, not an indication of greed, ineptitude or immorality or the part of the fishermen or the managers. Natural and anthropogenic factors influence fish populations, and fishing exacerbates the impacts. The commercial fishing industry is working with the managers to minimize these impacts (we're glad to reference here a recent effort by a diverse group of industry representatives to initiate a buy-out program in the New England groundfish fishery), and we've come a long way in the last decade or two.

Can Congress see through the smoke and mirrors?

Congress is in the process of determining what the future of fisheries management, and the recreational and commercial fisheries, will be like as it considers the reauthorization of the Magnuson Fisheries Conservation and Management Act. As they deliberate, we sincerely hope that their deliberations are based on investing the effort into finding out what's actually happening in our part of the world's oceans, not on the false sense of hysteria that's been manufactured for most of the last decade. An examination of the data will show that the sky's been up there for the last fifty years and there's no sign that it's falling any time soon. What's at risk isn't the fish, it's the fishermen, and they aren't at risk because of their actions, they're at risk because of an anti-fishing agenda that has no basis in reality.

The Oil Slick

In a press release jointly issued by Conservation International, the Living Oceans Society and the Ecology Action Centre, Pew/Seaweb spokesperson Sylvia Earle is quoted as saying *"my role is to encourage the Canadian government to engage with the scientific community to better understand the dire impact that high seas bottom trawling has on marine biodiversity, and to form their policies based upon that. We don't bulldoze forests to hunt deer, and we shouldn't destroy the seafloor to catch fish."* In a subsequent interview reported in the Toronto Globe and Mail, Ms. Earle further said *"imagine using a bulldozer to catch songbirds for food — that's what it's like,... Before trawling, you see eyes that look out from all the little crevices, crannies, burrows and little hills, all sorts of stuff that lives there. After a trawler has gone by, it looks like a superhighway, it's just flat. Nobody's home. A few fish may swim in and out but the residents, those that occupy the substrate, they're just smothered, they're crushed. It's like paving them over."*

While the press release went to great lengths to identify some of Ms. Earle's accomplishments as a pioneering ocean scientist, those that we presume are useful to her in carrying out her above stated role, it neglected to mention the fact that she serves in another role as well. She was recently reappointed to the Board of Kerr-McGee Corp.(http://www.kerr-mcgee.com/media/bios/board/bio_EarleSylvia.htm), which is described on its website as "one of the largest U.S.-based independent oil and natural gas exploration and production companies."

For an idea of what Kerr-McGee is involved in:

- *"Kerr-McGee owns a 50% working interest in the 133,000-acre block located in approximately 350 feet of water, approximately 125 miles southeast of Rio de Janeiro. Economic evaluations for various development scenarios of the field are under way. 'This is an exciting and meaningful opportunity for Kerr-McGee,' said (*Kerr-McGee Chief Operating Officer David A.) *Hager. 'The Chinook field has outstanding rock quality, and its potential could expand as we continue our appraisal program to delineate the full extent of the reservoir.'"* (January 24, 2006 - Oil, Gas and Energy News, Research and Trends - http://webbolt.ecnext.com/coms2/news_58816_ENN.
- *"Kerr-McGee Corp. announced a natural gas discovery in the deepwater Gulf of Mexico at the Claymore prospect located in Atwater Valley block 140. The Claymore #1 well was drilled to a total depth of approximately 25,000 feet and encountered more than 150 feet of net pay in multiple zones. "We are encouraged by the Claymore discovery," said David A. Hager, Kerr-McGee chief operating officer. "This is the first well in our 2006 subsalt program in the deepwater Gulf of Mexico, and this*

Nils E. Stolpe
njsha@voicenet.com

discovery provides momentum as we execute our exploration program that includes four to five additional high-impact subsalt targets this year.... Claymore is located in approximately 3,700 feet of water, 150 miles southeast of New Orleans, La. Kerr-McGee operates Claymore with a 33.5% working interest." (May 9, 2006 - Scandinavian Oil Gas Magazine - http://www.scandoil.com/moxie/news/Gas_news/kerrmcgee-announces-deepw.shtml.

• The Offshore Technology website (http://www.offshore-technology.com/projects/janice/) reports on the Janice oilfield located in theCentral North Sea approximately 175 miles east-south-east of Aberdeen *"Kerr-McGee acquired an interest in the licence block in 1995. It earned a total interest of 50.9% through drilling two successful appraisal wells during 1995 and 1996. A third successful appraisal well was drilled in late 1996. Kerr-McGee became the operator in May 1996. The producing horizon lies in the Jurassic section. Recoverable reserves are estimated at more than 70 million barrels* (of) *crude oil, and production was expected to peak by the first half of 1999. Extra processing capacity is available to allow Janice to serve as a hub for future developments. The Janice development plans envisage ten subsea wells, tied back to a floating production unit (FPU) using individual flowlines and risers. Of the ten wells, six are intended to be oil producers, while four have been planned as water injectors. This configuration will maximise the economic reserves and deliver the peak production forecasts of 50,000 gross barrels of oil per day."*

Of course, this brings up a number of interesting questions. Among them are:

- Why did the participating ENGOS fail to report Ms. Earle's role as a Kerr-McGee Corp. Board member?
- Why didn't any of the people reporting on this issue either discover or report her Kerr-McGee affiliation?
- Does Ms. Earle sees any difference in the supposed devastation inflicted on the ocean bottom by commercial fishing and by gas/oil exploration and development?
- What does the offshore energy industry think about sharing the ocean with commercial fishing vessels?
- In areas where they coexist, has the offshore oil/gas industry or the commercial fishing industry caused more harm to the coastal and offshore ecosystems.

A while ago we wrote on the level of exaggeration used by the anti-fishing claque in their attacks on trawling and dredging (see http://www.fishingnj.org/netusa6.htm). We've always espoused protecting critical areas of the sea floor from all anthropogenic threats, but only when such protection is appropriate. We would no more support an end to offshore energy development than we would accept an arbitrary closure of entire ocean basins to commercial harvesting, and neither should anyone else. The world's insatiable hunger for petroleum is more than matched by its hunger for protein, and while Ms. Earle evidently doesn't see it that way, there's room and resource enough in our oceans to continue to produce both.