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Fisheries and aquaculture

Fish for food, livelihood and trade

As vast as the world's oceans may seem, their resources are limited and ecosystems fragile. FAO believes that they can be protected and conserved with careful and responsible stewardship. The Organization is committed to helping countries manage fisheries and aquaculture more effectively and to ensuring that fish continue to be a significant source of food, livelihood and trade for future generations.

Key facts

More than 75 percent of the world's fish production is used for human consumption. The rest is mostly processed into fishmeal and fish oil.

The number of men and women who are directly engaged in primary production of fish either in capture from the wild or in aquaculture reached 43.5 million in 2006. In the last three decades the number of fishers and fish farmers has grown faster than the world's population and employment in traditional agriculture.

Fish and fish products topped US$85.9 billion dollars in exports in 2006, with further strong growth in trade expected. In developing countries, fishery net-exports (exports minus imports) are higher than those for other agricultural commodities such as coffee, tea, rice and bananas.

Some 52 percent of the world's marine fishery resources are "fully fished", or fished to the maximum allowable level. Another 28 percent is "overfished", depleted or recovering from depletion.

Fish contributes to food security in many regions of the world. A great number of developing countries rely on fish as a major source of protein – in 30 of them it accounts for over 45 percent of animal protein intake.

Since 1970, aquaculture production has increased at an average annual rate of 8.7 percent. With latest production at 51.7 million tonnes, for the first time aquaculture is now able to provide nearly half of all fish consumed.

Global importance of a growing sector

Fish is an excellent source of animal protein and a wide range of essential nutrients, contributing to food security in many regions. In 2006, people consumed over 75 percent of the world's fish production – 16.7 kilos per person – and by 2030 consumption is expected to rise to as much as 20 kilos each year. The other 25 percent is mostly processed into fishmeal and fish oil.

The global supply of fish and fish products hit a new record in 2006 – 143.6 million tonnes of fish and fish products including 51.7 million tonnes from the steadily increasing aquaculture sector. If overall production is to keep pace with an expanding world population, and given the strong likelihood that capture fisheries will remain stagnant, future growth will have to come from aquaculture.

Fisheries and aquaculture, directly or indirectly, play an essential role in the livelihoods of millions of people around the world – from the small-scale inland fishers who collect fish from lakes and swamps to the men and women who work in large processing plants. Taking account of dependents, as many as 520 million people could be dependent on the sector, or nearly 8 percent of the world population.

Meeting responsible fisheries challenges

In 1995, FAO member countries adopted the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which sets out principles and methods applicable to all aspects of fisheries and aquaculture. The code, widely used in the fisheries sector, outlines ways for developing and managing fisheries and aquaculture. FAO has developed international plans of action and strategies for improving information in capture fisheries and aquaculture as complementary instruments within the code to further promote the aims of responsible fisheries. The plans cover aspects of longline fisheries, shark fisheries, fishing capacity, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

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Landing the catch in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Acting on global issues

Climate change

Gradual global warming and associated physical changes, plus an increased frequency of extreme weather events, are exacerbating the pressures on natural resources and ecosystems. Climate variations will affect food supplies and livelihoods where some fishing communities face decreased availability of fish, increased production costs and reduced trade opportunities. However, changes in species distribution and abundance could create new markets. FAO is focused on ensuring that climate change action plans are linked to appropriate policy and legal frameworks and on shaping measures to minimize negative impacts and exploit opportunities.

Safety at sea

Fishing at sea is probably the most dangerous occupation in the world – an estimated 24 000 deaths occur each year. The main causes are not only poorly designed, constructed or equipped vessels, but also inappropriate human behaviour and a simple lack of awareness of safety issues and good practices. Further to revising the Code of Safety for Fishermen and Fishing Vessels and related voluntary guidelines, FAO is currently working with the International Labour Organization and the International Maritime Organization to develop new safety standards for small fishing vessels.

Standards and certification schemes

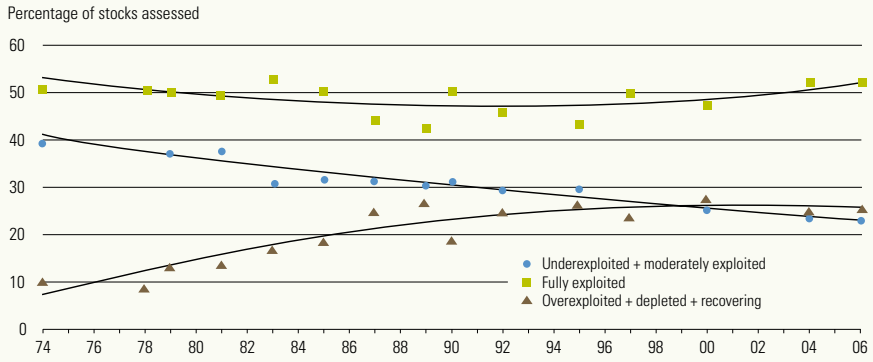
Growing consumer and retail power has given voice to rising concerns about human health and the social and environmental impacts of fisheries and aquaculture. As a result, private standards and certification schemes have multiplied throughout the supply chain. Designed to trace the origin of food products (and ensure their quality and safety), they are also beginning to focus on environmental and social conditions. FAO, as a global and neutral forum to discuss such issues, makes recommendations regarding the development of standards, provides guidance on how to address transparency, harmonization and complementarity of private and government standards and reviews certification procedures for global acceptance.

Fisheries and aquaculture information

The only repository for global fishery data, FAO plays a major role as a recognized authority on fisheries and aquaculture information. It compiles, collates, analyzes and integrates fishery and aquaculture data and information, creating a range of information products that are relevant, timely and made available to users (in print and electronically). Some of these include:

- Fisheries and aquaculture fact sheets: a rich source of information on fish species, fishery resources, fishing vessels, gear and equipment, country profiles and regional fishery bodies;
- *FAO Yearbook of Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics*: a compilation of data on capture production, aquaculture production and commodities;
- FISHINFO Network: a group of seven intergovernmental and governmental organizations plus FAO's GLOBEFISH marketing and trade information services that bring together buyers and sellers at international conferences, offer up-to-date information on markets and price trends and provide training in food quality standards;
- *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* (SOFIA): published every two years, this comprehensive document gives a global overview of the world's capture fisheries and aquaculture.

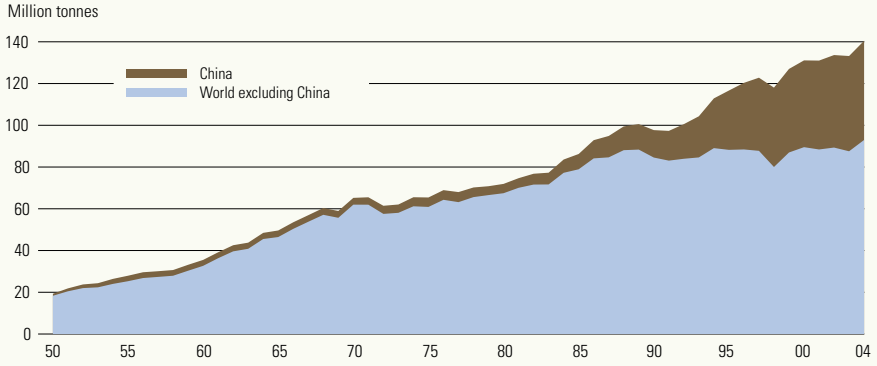
Global trends in the state of world marine stocks since 1974



Most fish stocks are under pressure from overfishing.

Source: SOFIA 2006

World capture fisheries and aquaculture production



Global fish production from capture fisheries and aquaculture is currently the highest on record – more than 143.6 million tonnes in 2006.

Source: SOFIA 2006

Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy

Telephone: (+39) 06 57051
Fax: (+39) 06 57053152
E-mail: FAO-HQ@fao.org

Media enquiries:
Telephone: (+39) 06 57053625
Fax: (+39) 06 57053729