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Protecting the
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The World's Fisheries are in Trouble

Oceans cover more than two-thirds of the globe, and they are as important to us as they are vast. However, the world's oceans are at a critical juncture and face a bleak future if nothing is done to restore them. Global fish fleets are taking too much ocean wildlife from the water— and the laws meant to manage and conserve the fisheries are often ignored or selectively enforced.

The result: declining fisheries and destruction of marine habitat are threatening the Earth's largest and most important natural system, as well as the nearly billion people who rely on fish as their primary protein source and the tens of millions of people who depend on the sea for their livelihood. Since the 1980s, the global seafood catch has been falling despite more and better equipped fishing boats in the water.

Exacerbating global overfishing are massive subsidies given by a handful of foreign governments to their fishing fleets to increase their ability to fish. Eliminating these overfishing subsidies is likely the largest single action that can be taken to protect the world's fisheries and the communities that depend on them.

Key Findings of Recent Fisheries Related Research:

- Scientists project the collapse of all species of wild seafood that are currently fished by mid-century. (B. Worm et al., 2006)
- 90 percent of all the “big fish” – tuna, marlin, and sharks – are gone. (R. Myers et al., 2003)
- It is estimated that 85 percent of the world commercial fish populations are fully exploited, overexploited, depleted or recovering from depletion. (SOFIA 2010)
- Of the top ten species that account for about 30 percent of the world capture fisheries production in terms of quantity, six correspond to stocks that are considered to be fully exploited or overexploited (anchoveta, Chilean jack mackerel, Alaska pollock, Japanese anchovy, blue whiting and Atlantic herring). (SOFIA 2011)
- Globally, fish provides more than 1.5 billion people with almost 20 percent of their average per capita intake of animal protein, and 3.0 billion people with at least 15 percent of such protein. (SOFIA 2010)
- Fisheries subsidies also have been found to support illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. A recent study estimates the cost of illegal and unreported fishing alone at US\$10–23.5 billion per year. (D. Agnew et al. 2009)

EU Specific Findings:

- According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), European Union countries comprise the third largest global fishing “nation” behind China and Peru. In 2009, EU countries caught more than five million tons of fish and employed more than 140,000 people as fishers.
- Spain accounts for 25 percent of fisheries employment in the EU. Spain, Greece and Italy combined account for 60 percent of fisheries employment. (European Commission 2010)
- The EU is responsible for 4.6 percent of the world’s fisheries and aquaculture production, making it the fourth largest producer worldwide. The EU’s top three most fished species are Atlantic herring, sprat and blue whiting, which comprise 30 percent of all EU catch. (European Commission 2010)
- In Europe, 63 percent of the fish stocks in the Atlantic and 82 percent in the Mediterranean are overfished. A recent impact assessment by the European Commission concluded that if the status quo is maintained and fishing continues at the current rate, only nine percent of European fish stocks would be managed at sustainable levels by 2022, despite the commitment by countries to manage all fisheries sustainably by 2015. (European Commission 2011)