



Workers cut a giant whale shark into pieces at a seafood market. Fuzhou City, Fujian. September 13, 2007

NO MORE FISH IN THE SEA

THE WORLD'S SEAFOOD INDUSTRY IS DESTROYING ITSELF AND OUR OCEANS

by Mary Dennis

“It’s pretty scary, and I think people do need to know about this because it’s crisis time.” Sari Tolvanen, Oceans Campaigner for Greenpeace International, sounds somber as she explains what’s wrong with the world’s seafood supply. Bluefin tuna, which is poised to join the blue whale and the tiger on the CITES list of endangered species, is just one of a large number of marine species that have been devastatingly overfished. Compounding that is the unsustainable aquaculture that is decimating coastlines across the world, as the sale of farm-raised fish has surpassed wild-

caught for the first time. Nowhere are these issues more important than in China, the world’s largest seafood exporter, producer of 70 percent of the world’s aquaculture, and home to some of the world’s worst fishery and aquaculture regulations.

“It’s crisis time”

China is far from alone in lacking adequate regulations. The global fishing industry has done a dismal job of protecting its future – and that of the world’s marine ecosystems. The problem stems in part from the difficulty in addressing an issue that is so

hard to define. “Scientists have said studying fish is like counting trees, but you can’t see them and they move,” says Tolvanen. “It’s really hard to figure out how many fish are in the ocean, and then exactly what impact that has had on other marine life. Marine mammals, birds, sea turtles – they all depend on these fish for food.” As do one billion people in the world. Some scientists estimate the world’s fisheries will totally collapse by 2048. The exact year may be up for debate, but the trend is undeniable: If we continue to catch and raise fish the way we do, we are going to run out.

PHOTO: IMAGINE CHINA

CHINA'S FISHERIES: UNREGULATED AND UNSUSTAINABLE

Highly destructive fishing methods

Most of Chinese fishing is done by trawling, which involves dragging nets the size of football fields through the ocean or across the ocean floor. Everything in the net's path is destroyed or caught. In most countries, most of what is caught is considered unusable bycatch and thrown back into the ocean dead, including sea turtles, sharks, dolphins, sea birds, coral and smaller fish. In China, most marine species caught are retained and consumed, sold, or used as feed.

There are no effective regulations in China on net mesh size, and fishermen do not have a maximum quota to obey. Chinese fleets adhere to international regulations while out on the high seas, but in Chinese waters, outside of the three-month summer ban (see below), marine life faces some of the most aggressive fishing in the world.

Lack of protected areas

China has no protected "no-take" zones where fishing is prohibited. The world's total protected marine area is less than one percent of the oceans. For marine ecosystems to remain healthy and fisheries to remain sustainable, areas important to marine wildlife, such as breeding grounds or biodiversity hotspots, need to be protected.

Deliberate hunting of sharks and other endangered species

Any species listed as protected by international law is automatically listed as protected by Chinese wildlife law. However, this "protection" carries no legal force. The most obvious example involves sharks. With the huge demand for their fins, any shark entering Chinese waters is risking its life. The plankton-feeding whale sharks and basking sharks, for example, are both internationally

In Chinese waters, marine life faces some of the most aggressive fishing in the world

protected, they are caught and listed as unintentional bycatch, then sold for a very high price. Enormous whale shark fins, which are not edible, can be found on display at expensive restaurants; sometimes the entire fish is sold to museums or universities for exhibition. Ignorance of wildlife protection laws is so widespread that media reports often give positive coverage of a shark capture.



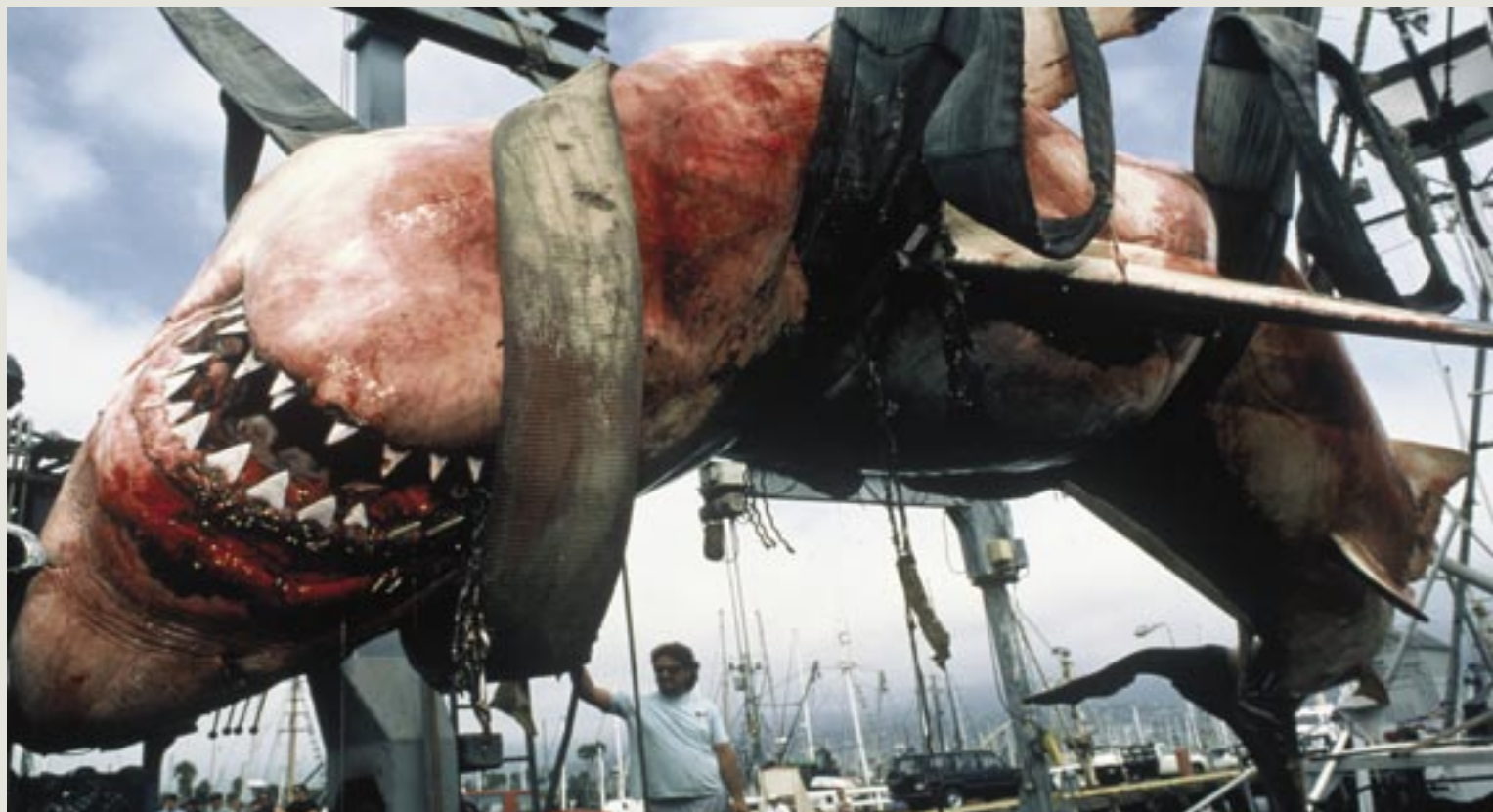
A bottom trawler hauls up an ancient deep sea coral and dumps it back as bycatch. Tasman Sea, New Zealand, 2005

Delaying tactics by the Asian bloc

International fishery negotiations are usually agreed to under consensus. Japan, Korea and China, which all have very large fishing fleets, are usually the last nations to agree to any sustainability, conservation or management methods, delaying measures that would otherwise be instituted.

Summer fishing ban

One of the only measures China takes to protect its fisheries is to ban fishing for three months during the summer to allow fish supplies to replenish.



A 15-foot Great White shark, caught and drowned in a gill net, is brought to shore. Santa Barbara, California. 2008

CHINA'S AQUACULTURE: FILLING WETLANDS WITH TOXIC WASTE

Encroachment on natural habitat

No country exemplifies this problem better than China. Given insufficient regulations on aquaculture site selection, fish farms can be set up almost anywhere. Local governments encourage aquaculture in order to boost local economies, allowing valuable coastal and freshwater wetlands to be developed.

Heavy pollution discharge

Aquaculture releases chemicals, antibiotics, and fish sewage into surrounding water. Shrimp farming is among the most detrimental of all practices. Since shrimp live in warm water, tropical areas important to young fish and the maintenance of coastal fisheries, such as mangrove forests, are often razed for shrimp farms. Antibiotics and other drugs are added to the water to keep the shrimp healthy; in a few years, the water becomes too toxic, and the farm must close. The shrimp farmers usually move further along the coast to begin the process again, leaving the previous farm as a toxic waste site.

Depletion of wild forage fish

Most aquaculture depends on forage fish for feed. No country has yet found an effective alternative, but the problem is most severe in China. Forage fish such as anchovies have already been exploited to the max in China, which has become the world's largest importer of forage fish from countries such as Peru. Chinese fish farms are competing with wild carnivorous fish across the globe, such as tuna, for their primary food source.

Introduction of non-native species & genetic pollution

The existence of fish farms increases the risk of non-native, potentially invasive species being released into the wild, which could upset the balance of the ecosystem. Genetic pollution is also a risk – farmed shrimp, for example, can cross-breed with native shrimp populations, introducing traits that might be desirable for a farmed species but could be detrimental to the wild population.

Shrimp farming is among the most detrimental practices

Good models: Multi-Trophic and 3-2-1

There has been positive work done in Chinese aquaculture. China's freshwater carp, for example, is farmed with energy and feed efficiency that surpasses much of the rest of the world. This multi-trophic system uses several species of carp, each feeding on a separate food source – phytoplankton, zooplankton, mollusks, and plants – to simulate the food web and maximize efficiency, with bottom feeders to clean up sewage. Another positive system is the 3-2-1 model, which farms a balance of algae, filter feeders, and carnivorous fish in a manner that maintains water cleanliness. The WWF is working on a global program called the Aquaculture Dialogues to promote such methods, and give fish farmed sustainably an advantage in the marketplace.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Don't eat sharks or other rare species

For China, one of the biggest challenges lies in overcoming the cultural value placed on eating rare food. The prime example is shark's fin, which is flavorless, and arguably tastes like vermicelli covered in mucus. This value system, which is also prevalent in Japan, places a high market value on species simply because they are rare and expensive, including sharks, wild-caught groupers, and humphead wrasse. There is some effort to denounce this practice, including a series of anti-shark's fin billboards featuring Yao Ming.

Start asking questions

What species is it? Where did it come from? Was it caught legally? How was it caught? Was it sustainable? Is it certified sustainable by a third party? At this point, in China (and most of the world) there is often simply not enough information to make an informed choice. But even if none of your questions get answers, let your fishmonger or restaurant owner know there is a demand for sustainably caught seafood, and ask them to convey

that demand to their supplier.

Seek out sustainable options

Choose restaurants that try to offer sustainable options. International hotels that conform to North American or European standards are more likely to have policies concerning sustainable seafood. The Fairmont's Lunar 8 is a good example – not only does their menu not feature shark, but they also try to follow seafood watch guides put out by the WWF and Monterey Bay Aquarium (www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/SeafoodWatch/web/sfw_regional.aspx) as much as possible. In so doing, they are helping to raise awareness of a demand for sustainable seafood among Chinese suppliers.

Look for Thai canned tuna

Seventy percent of the world's canned tuna is now produced by brands certified by the ISSF (International Seafood Sustainability Foundation) to catch tuna sustainably. Most tuna from Thailand is ISSF-certified, and is available in China.

What species is it? Was it caught legally?

ECO STATS

Number of sharks killed by humans each year: **73 million**
Oceana.org

Number of humans killed by sharks last year: **5**
Discovery News

Almost **80%** of the world's fish stocks are fished unsustainably
UN Food and Agriculture Organization (2007)

About **20%** of the world's wild caught seafood is caught illegally

The bigeye (yellowfin or ahi) tuna, the second most valuable tuna species, could be gone from most oceans in the next **5** years

If fishery management is not changed, there could be a total collapse of commercial fisheries by **2048**

Since 1950, **90%** of top predatory fish, including tuna, sharks and marlins, have disappeared

Over **1 billion** people depend on wild caught fish as their primary source of protein, primarily in Africa and Southeast Asia

Scientists estimate **30-70%** of the world's oceans must be protected areas in order to be sustainable

Currently, less than **1%** of the world's oceans are protected no-take areas

It is estimated there are **2.5** times as many fishing vessels in the world than is sustainable

Greenpeace

The orange roughy can live to be over **149** years old

Ocean quahog clams can live up to **225** years

Monterey Bay Aquarium
Seafood Watch

China is the world's largest exporter of fish, and produces **70%** of the world's aquaculture

In the past **50** years, the Yellow Sea region has lost over **40%** of its wetlands, largely due to aquaculture

WWF



A sea lion caught in a gill net



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