

Hook, Line, and Sinker

The world's seafood supply may soon be wiped out, scientists warn.



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If we don't change the way we treat the ocean, fish may be rare in the future.

Can fish get off the hook? The world's seafood supply may run out by 2048 if a decline in marine species continues at its current rate, according to a recent report published in the journal *Science*.

An international team of 14 researchers spent four years analyzing fish populations, catch records, and other marine studies. They discovered that 29 percent of all fish species have nearly disappeared. Fish populations have dropped to at least 90 percent below their historical highs.

"If the long-term trend continues, all fish and seafood species are projected to collapse within my lifetime," says research leader Boris Worm of Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. "Our children will see a world without seafood if we don't change things."

What's to Blame?

The study cites overfishing and pollution for the **depletion**, or reduction in quantity, of edible seafood. Also contributing to the drop are environmental factors, such as habitat loss and **global warming**—the gradual rise in Earth's average temperature.

The fishing industry generates \$80 billion a year. Some fishing industry experts have questioned the report's dismal predictions.

Reading Passage

Despite the team's gloomy findings, the authors say it's not too late to reverse the trend. The researchers have called for measures to protect current fish populations, such as having nations set limits on large-scale fishing, reducing pollution, and creating protected areas called **marine reserves**.

Ripple Effect

The loss of ocean life will cause more than just a shortage of seafood. Overfishing can damage the entire ocean ecosystem. An **ecosystem** is a community of organisms functioning as a unit with its environment. The disappearance of one species can throw the entire system out of balance and cause disaster up and down the food chain. If smaller fish disappear, larger creatures would find themselves in big trouble.

Catch of the Day

Americans like their seafood. On average, they consumed, or ate, 16.6 pounds each in 2004, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Here are the top 10 types of seafood eaten in 2004.

