

A CALL TO ACTION

TO REDUCE BYCATCH IN FISHERIES

As a global environmental resource, the protection of the seas is an international responsibility. Scientists argue that over-fishing poses one of the greatest threats to ocean biodiversity. Already, 70% of the world's fish stocks are over-fished or fully exploited.

Certain fishing gears, such as (bottom) trawls and longlines, are very unselective and catch high levels of non-target 'bycatch' species. It is estimated that millions of tonnes of bycatch are caught by these and other fisheries every year. Such fishing practices greatly add to the over-exploitation of marine resources.

In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly stated that 'the issue of bycatch and discards in fishing operations warrants serious attention by the international community.' Yet global bycatch levels remain high, as few meaningful efforts aimed at reduction have been employed.

Excessive levels of bycatch can disrupt entire marine communities, causing a decline in vulnerable species and threatening the livelihoods of coastal people dependent on the seas' resources. The economic losses of discarding non-target catches run into billions of dollars. Inadequate control of bycatch directly undermines sustainable fisheries management practices as outlined by the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Although the high level of wastage that follows non-target catches should be condemned, bycatch utilisation is not a solution in itself. Fundamentally, the level of non-target catch removed from the oceans must be lowered both by reducing overall fishing effort and more specifically by reducing bycatch per unit effort (BPUE) of fisheries. Fisheries management programmes must incorporate compulsory bycatch assessment and reduction mechanisms, and financial and technical resources should be dedicated towards these ends.

Bycatch: a case study of shrimp fisheries

- Shrimp trawling is a 'catch-all' technique. Up to 20kg of marine life can be caught and discarded to obtain just 1kg of shrimp.
- Globally, shrimp fisheries account for a third of discarded 'bycatch', yet produce only 2% of seafood. Survival rates of most discarded species is low.
- Trawlers exploit shrimp stocks in some of the world's poorest countries. As local fish species are caught alongside shrimp, many fishermen now struggle to make a living from remaining fish stocks.
- Shrimp trawling is one of the greatest threats to sea turtles and other endangered species such as seahorses. Currently, shrimp fisheries kill an estimated 150,000 turtles every year.

We, the undersigned, ask for an end to the over-exploitation of the oceans, and call for a UN FAO **International Plan of Action on Bycatch Reduction** that addresses the high levels of bycatch found in shrimp and other fisheries.

Sincerely

Signed

Name

Title

Organisation

Contact details

**Please fax completed form to EJF
on 020 7359 7123, or post to:
EJF, 5 St Peter's Street, London N1 8JD**



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