

Fearmongers threaten industry, human health

The media has been flooded with doom and gloom stories of fish stock wipeouts since last fall when Robert Redford's Sundance Film Festival previewed the controversial "End of the Line" movie. The negative coverage has intensified tremendously with the premier of the film in England coinciding with World Oceans Day on June 8.

The movie is based on a book by Charles Clover, who largely based his book on a paper prepared in 2003 by Ransom Myers and Boris Worm. The paper, which was published by *Nature* magazine, claimed there had been a 90% reduction in the biomass of large pelagic fishes in the oceans of the world. Following publication, *Nature* was hit by a wave of criticism for allowing such poor science and environmental advocacy disguised as science to see the light of day.

The criticism included comments by noted Pacific large pelagic scientist Dr. John Silbert, who labeled the Myers/Worm paper as "fundamentally flawed" and said that the authors "do the fisheries community a disservice by applying a simplistic analysis ... which exaggerates declines in abundance and implies unrealistic rebuilding benchmarks."

Dr. Gary Sharp of the Center for Climate/Ocean Resources Study commented that the paper "is not good science" and called it the "most recent nonsense." Dr. Mike Sissenwine, a world leading authority on large pelagics, remarked that most of the decline cited by the authors occurred more than 50 years ago, before establishment of international regional fisheries management authorities to tackle problem fisheries. Sissenwine

also commented, "Humanity cannot harvest the oceans and expect to leave behind a pristine environment."

In the face of the overwhelming criticism, even Myers ultimately agreed, saying, "When fisheries management is used ... there is not a concern about the biomass reducing by 50% or 60% or even 70%."

GUEST COLUMN

by Rich Ruais

But the Myers/Worm damage had already been done. Charles Clover got his easy sensational book and Executive Film Producer Christopher Hird got his sexy, environmentally obscene but sure-to-be financially successful film.

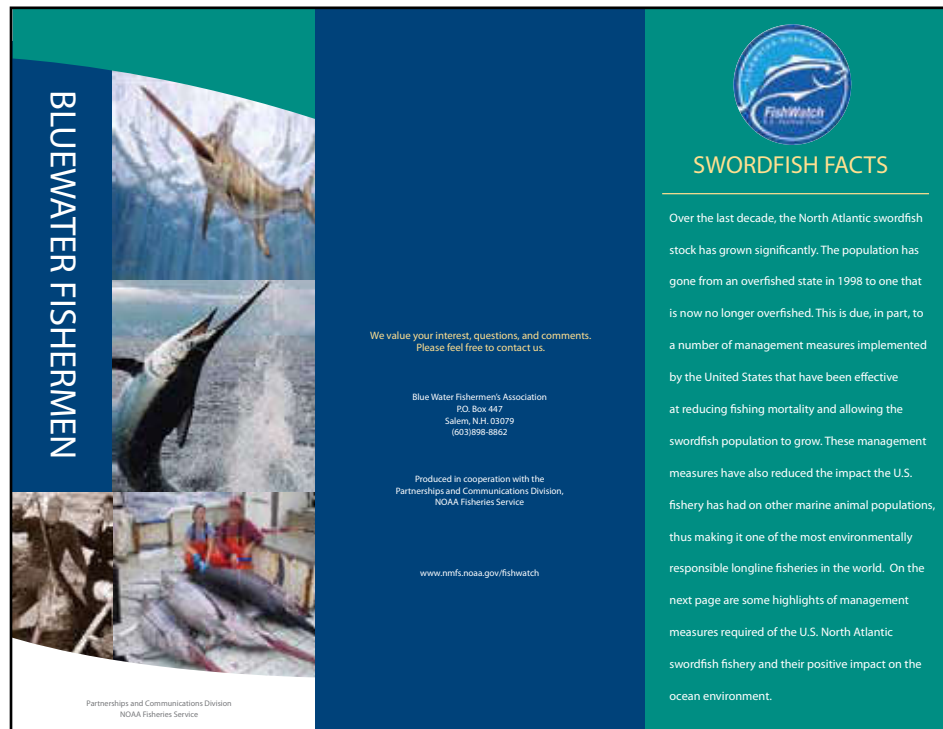
Hird is now asking top-of-the-line seafood retailers to run the film in their outlets. Movie stars are waiting in line for someone to listen to their condemnation of the decision by Nobu to keep bluefin tuna on the menu. This criticism persists even though the world-class Asian-themed restaurants, which are partially owned by movie actor Robert DeNiro, added a disclaimer that overfishing in the Mediterranean Sea is occurring.

And this problem is getting worse.

"Empty seas"

Worm's even more outrageous recent claim that the world will run out of seafood by 2048 has been picked up by more than 17,000 Google searches, according to Nils Stolpe, a media watchdog for the Garden State Seafood

Association and other groups. This claim has been labeled "just mind-bogglingly stupid" by eminent fish scientist Dr. Ray Hilborn and, fortunately, also rejected by new National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco.



Brochure being distributed to set the record straight on swordfish.

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ICCAT successes

Yet, the messages of the "End of the Line" fable and Worm's "2048 empty seas" are far from the reality brought to light by the latest assessments from the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

While overfishing problems still exist for east and west bluefin tuna, billfishes, and some sharks, these assessments reflect many success stories:

- Swordfish has been rebuilt beyond the biomass necessary to produce maximum sustainable yield (Bmsy);
- Yellowfin tuna is near or at Bmsy;

- Bigeye is at 92% of Bmsy;
- Skipjack tuna east and west are above Bmsy;
- Northern albacore has recently rebuilt to levels near Bmsy; and
- South Atlantic albacore is about 91% of Bmsy.

As far as our coastal fisheries, the latest 2009 report to Congress from Acting National Marine Fisheries Service Director Dr. Jim Balsiger notes that "the majority of our domestic assessed fish stocks are not subject to overfishing (84%) or not overfished (77%)."

It doesn't sound like we are heading for empty seas here at home either.

Boycott

So how should the seafood-producing industry and knowledgeable public respond to damaging and flawed environmental advocacy science stories? Here are my two-cents.

First, boycott movies like "End of the Line." Do not contribute to lining the pockets of doomsday profiteers willing to distort reality and frighten people away from consuming healthy seafood.

Does anyone really think that most consumers will go to high-end fish markets or restaurants, refer to their wallet-size "certified fish choice card," and then select the sustainable sardines or tilapia instead of swordfish and tuna steaks as recommended? Of course not. Faced with such a choice, consumers will head to the meat counter and fillet mignon.

Given the irrefutable health benefits of seafood consumption, it is unconscionable that anyone would discourage it in this way.

Get the word out

Second, the true success stories and information on remaining problems needs to get out to the general public, but this will not happen with a few of us preaching only in our own trade magazines.

We need to use programs like NOAA's Fish Watch, which has the scientific competency and objectivity to verify the facts on the status of a fishery stock or at least add credibility to industry promotions when they are accurate.

Over 30,000 NOAA Fish Watch logo brochures, jointly produced by NOAA's See GUEST COLUMN, next page

Do not contribute to lining the pockets of doomsday profit mongers willing to distort reality and frighten people away from consuming healthy seafood.

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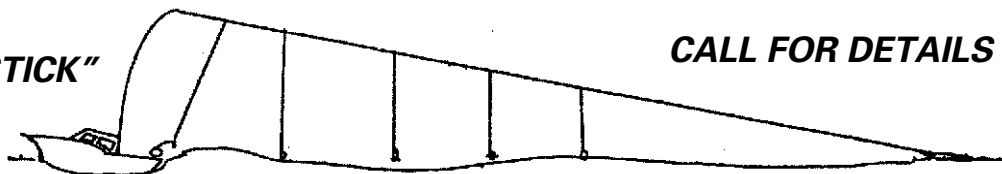
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ANPR comments Continued from page 1B

wants a 12-month season permanently established and will not support eventually returning to the June 1 general category opening date.

● **Harpoon limits** – Change the current daily retention limit for the harpoon category of unlimited giants (81" or larger) and two large medium bluefin (73" to less than 81") by eliminating the limit on large medium fish.

According to NMFS, the upsides of this option are higher catches for fishermen, higher landings for dealers, and reduced discards of large mediums. One of the possible downsides is potential increased discards of fish under 73" due to increased fishing effort on smaller commercial-sized bluefin.

● **Minimum commercial size** – Reduce the size of fish that can be sold from the current 73" or greater. NMFS has heard from a lot of industry people who want a 65" or 68" minimum commercial size, which is more in line with what it was years ago.

Another suggestion is to allow retention of a limited number of fish of some size smaller than 73" along with a set number of fish greater than 73".

For illustration purposes, NMFS gave this example in the ANPR: "One fish 65" to less than 73" plus unlimited (or maximum allowed under in-season daily retention limit) bluefin tuna greater than 73" per day."

Making this change likely will be a lot more complicated than many commercial fishermen expect. In its ANPR comments, NMFS indicated that it expects any reduction in the commercial minimum size will "change future patterns of fishing mortality," meaning the age at which fish are caught.

"This could potentially impact the projected stock recovery trajectory due to changes in assumptions used in stock status projections (regarding the reproductive potential of the stock)," the agency said. "Increased landings of smaller bluefin tuna could reduce projected spawning stock biomass and slow the rate of stock rebuilding."

Changing the minimum size also could result in commercial and recreational fishermen pursuing the same size class, NMFS said.

● **Charter/headboats** – The ANPR contains several options that would apply to the charter/headboat category, including allowing these vessels to use harpoons and to fish commercially and recreationally on the same day.

The public comment deadline on the bluefin tuna options was June 30, shortly after CFN went to press.

Swordfish

However, the public comment deadline for options related to topics besides bluefin tuna is Aug. 31.

Among these are several options aimed at the swordfish fishery, including: increase the incidental catch limit on bluefin tuna for the pelagic longline fishery to improve profitability of longline trips and potentially increase swordfish

landings; create a squid trawl vessel exemption from the multiple permits now required for these vessels to land swordfish; and establish a new HMS handgear permit.

This new permit basically would be an expanded version of the bluefin general category permit. In addition to bluefin, holders of this "HMS general commercial handgear permit" would be able to retain swordfish and some shark species.

The existing bluefin general category permit is an open-access permit, meaning anyone can get one. NMFS suggested the HMS handgear permit could remain open access or could be converted to a limited-access permit.

Catch shares

NMFS also is seeking comments by Aug. 31 on two possible catch share programs for HMS

fisheries. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the parent agency of NMFS, has made the adoption of catch shares a priority.

The first option in the ANPR is a limited-access privilege program (LAPP), which would distribute a portion of the total allowable catch to fishermen through their permits.

"Even in a fishery that is not achieving its quota, such as bluefin tuna and swordfish, LAPPs provide an opportunity to 'lock-in' a share of the quota, which may prove valuable if the fishery becomes quota-limited in the future," NMFS said.

The other catch share option is individual bycatch caps (IBCs), which would give permit holders a share of the total amount of allowable bycatch species, including nontarget species and, possibly, protected species.

Comment

More detailed information on the ANPR, including the 10-page *Federal Register* notice that details the questions NMFS wants the public to address, is available online at <www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms>. Click on "Breaking News" on the left-hand side of the page.

NMFS scheduled five public hearings on the ANPR, including one in the Northeast. It was scheduled to be held June 29 at the Radisson Hotel Plymouth Harbor, 180 Water St., Plymouth, MA starting at 5 pm.

All public comment must be identified with this code number "0648-AX85" and sent to NMFS by any of the following means.

● E-mail through the federal e-rulemaking portal at <www.regulations.gov>. Enter the identification number "0648-AX85" in the search box to get to the right page.

● Fax comments to (301) 713-1917 addressed to the attention of Margo Schulze-Haugen. Or

● Mail comments to NMFS SF1, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

For more information, call Sarah McLaughlin at (978) 281-9260 or Randy Blankinship at (727) 824-5399.

Lorelei Stevens

LAPPs provide an opportunity to 'lock-in' a share of the quota, which may prove valuable if the fishery becomes quota-limited in the future.

—NMFS

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Partnership and Communications Office and Blue Water Fishermen's Association, are being distributed in the Northeast to set the record straight on swordfish. It's a starting point.

Control imports

Third, we need to encourage our government to take steps to ban the imports of fish harvested outside of accepted ICCAT agreements.

NOAA, the secretary of commerce, and the President already have the authority to identify/certify countries engaged in and products resulting from illegal fishing and bad fishing practices and ban their importation. They need to do what they have been empowered to do.

If the US and the governments of Japan, the European Community, and a few more of the largest seafood producers and importers were to fulfill this longstanding responsibility, the problem effectively would be eliminated in an efficient fashion.

In this context, "certification" is a process undertaken by a government or the scientific arm of a regional fishery management organization. This contrasts with the private "eco-label" "certification" entities that seem to pop up every day.

There are dangers in supporting these private certification programs. One should be suspicious of private groups taking over the fish and human health

responsibilities of governments, and one should be especially concerned that environmental advocacy groups ultimately will take over these "certification" processes.

Derailing good health

In conclusion, Nobu, other restaurants, and fish retailers should not be in the business of scaring people away from seafood over sustainability issues. It's the government's job to ensure sustainability.

And "End of the Line"-type fearmongers and certification advocates bear responsibility for denying the overwhelming health benefits of increased seafood consumption, Omega-3, and selenium for healthy hearts and neurological and developmental skills, especially for young children, every time the choice for seafood is not made.

We in the seafood-producing industry need to communicate this message to the public.

Rich Ruais

Rich Ruais is the executive director of the East Coast Tuna Association and Blue Water Fishermen's Association and editor of Tuna News, an online news service.



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