

# **Sustainable marine fisheries? Wishful thinking!**

Overfishing, loss of biodiversity, destruction of habitats  
- the vitality of the seas collapses.

## The contradiction

From an environmental point of view, sustainability means „that goods and services should be produced in ways that do not use resources that cannot be replaced and that do not damage the environment“.<sup>1</sup>

However, global fishing is far from sustainable: 90% of fish stocks are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted.<sup>2</sup> Catches have been declining for years, but this has been offset by geographical expansion and technical advances in high sea and deep sea fishing.<sup>3</sup>

In the last 60 years the share of the world’s ocean area fished has increased from 60 to 90%. But despite doubling the distances travelled in the same period, only a third of the amount per kilometre is caught.<sup>4</sup> This clearly shows the contradiction of „sustainable“ marine fisheries: The populations of marine animals can no longer recover sufficiently.<sup>5</sup>

## Subsidies for the fishing industry

Co-responsible for the exploitation of the oceans is the common subsidy practice in the area of industrial fishing.<sup>6</sup> Fishing fleets often only make a profit thanks to subsidies (especially fuel subsidies) and low wage levels.<sup>7,8</sup> Not to mention other precarious working conditions reminiscent of slave labour.<sup>9</sup> This is why UN sustainable development target 14.6 calls for the abolition of fisheries subsidies, which contribute to overfishing, by 2020.<sup>10</sup>

## Natural equilibrium in danger

As on land, various plant and animal organisms are interrelated in the sea. Fishing has severely disrupted these natural relationships in recent decades by hunting for ever smaller species. In this approach, fisheries target young animals and the prey of larger, overfished species. Accordingly, the populations cannot recover. At the end of this process, known as „fishing down marine food webs“, fisheries end up catching plankton.<sup>11</sup>

## Our appetite destroys the ecosystem

Global consumption of fishes has grown twice as fast as population growth every year since 1961. It has increased from an average of 9 to 20.3 kg per person per year.<sup>12</sup> No wonder the seas are exhausted. And no label can change that if we are not prepared to stop our consumption in countries that do not rely on marine animals as their main food source. George Monbiot, journalist and environmentalist, sums up one of the biggest challenges for marine conservation today: „Stop eating fish. It’s the only way to save the life in our seas“. <sup>13</sup> Sustainability in fisheries remains a contradiction in terms until we have realised the following facts:

**Stop consumption = restoration of marine animal populations and of marine ecosystems.**

**Constant or even increased consumption = destruction of life in our oceans.**



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- <sup>1</sup> Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sustainability>
  - <sup>2</sup> <https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=1812>
  - <sup>3</sup> Palomares & Pauly 2019
  - <sup>4</sup> Tickler et al. 2018
  - <sup>5</sup> Worm et al. 2006
  - <sup>6</sup> According to Sumaila et al. (2019), in 2018 around 63% of the 35.4 billion US\$ in fishing subsidies worldwide were invested in capacity-enhancing measures. 22% and thus the largest share was spent on fuel subsidies.
  - <sup>7</sup> [www.fair-fish.ch](http://www.fair-fish.ch)
  - <sup>8</sup> Sala et al. 2018
  - <sup>9</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/11/181107093807.htm>
  - <sup>10</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg14>
  - <sup>11</sup> Pauly et al. 1998
  - <sup>12</sup> FAO. 2018
  - <sup>13</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/09/seas-stop-eating-fish-fishing-industry-government>

## Tips

[Video: The end of the line](#)

[Video: Sustainably Labeled Seafood - Can the MSC Seal be Trusted](#)

**Let's give the seas a break.**  
Sustainably. For marine life. For us. For our descendants.  
[www.kyma-sea.org/break](http://www.kyma-sea.org/break)

