

## **An Overview of the World's Fisheries**

### **What is a commercial fishery?**

A commercial fishery is the industry of catching a particular fish species or other marine species for profit. Commercial fisheries exist throughout the world.

### **What is the status of our fisheries?**

Although humans have exploited marine species for millennia, advances in technology over the last few decades have greatly altered the way humans exploit fisheries. Overfishing—fishing faster than the fish can replenish—is now the greatest threat to marine biodiversity. Today, thirteen of the planet's fifteen major oceanic fishing areas are now fished at or beyond capacity. The problem has grown to such proportions that the populations of some fished species, such as haddock and bluefin tuna, have been decimated.

### **Is fish farming a better alternative?**

With a growing world population and marine fisheries in decline, fisheries experts have long hoped that aquaculture might one day take up the slack. In some ways it already is, but a growing number of marine scientists believe that parts of the industry may instead contribute to the further decline of marine resources. The intense controversy pertains to which species are being farmed and how they are being farmed. Salmon, shrimp and tuna are examples of carnivorous animals that must be fed other fish. Most farms raising these species ultimately consume more fish than they produce. The profit motive also inclines many farms to implement large-scale, industrial practices that can result in pollution, the destruction of marine habitat, and a tendency to generate diseases that pose a risk to both wild fish and consumers.

In order to be truly sustainable, aquaculture operations need to operate in ways that do not harm marine ecosystems or coastal communities; that neither consume more resources than they produce. In China, millions of people depend on farms that raise carp, an herbivorous fish that requires no fishmeal. Carp are omnivorous species like catfish and tilapia that can be farmed with very little need of fishmeal or fish oil. Farms that raise shellfish like abalone, clams, oysters and mussels also produce a net gain in protein for a hungry world. These kinds of aquaculture are best suited for truly taking pressure off our over-exploited oceans.

### **What's the big deal?**

For human populations, fishing has long been a way of life, a source of food and income. It is the livelihood for some 200 million people worldwide. Approximately 20 percent of the animal protein consumed by humans is derived from fish. Since living marine resources continue to be overexploited by an industry too large for the resources available, many fisheries are collapsing.

This means species are declining, a major world food source is being put at risk, jobs are being lost, and ecosystems are inalterably changing.