



# OCEANS

## Introduction

Fishing may be an ancient tradition but sophisticated technology and a global boom in the industry during the past 50 years have outstripped nature's ability to replenish the seas. Wasteful, destructive fishing practices are decimating global fish stocks, damaging marine ecosystems and threatening food security, economic stability and the livelihoods of tens of millions of people.



Left: Family members selling tuna at markets in the Solomon Islands. Overfishing threatens food security in Pacific Island countries like the Solomon Islands. ©Greenpeace/Hilton.  
 Right: Foreign fishing fleets have moved en masse to the Pacific. ©Greenpeace/Grace.



## Global fisheries crisis

Around the globe, some 3.5 million fishing boats compete for dwindling fish stocks. According to the United Nations, 76 per cent of the world's fisheries are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted. In November 2006, an article in *Science* magazine predicted the collapse of all species of wild seafood by 2048. Some species have already been fished to commercial extinction. In 2006, about 30 currently fished species were considered "depleted", meaning catches are well below historic levels, irrespective of the amount of fishing effort exerted.

The wasteful and indiscriminate fishing methods used today include vast trawler nets large enough to hold several jumbo jets, factory ships that catch and process several hundred tonnes of fish daily, and fishing lines 130 kilometres long and dripping in thousands of baited hooks.

Industrial fleets account for only one

per cent of fishing vessels but they take more than half the global catch of 80 to 90 million tonnes per year. In the Pacific island of Niue, a fleet of small boats and canoes caught an estimated 100 tonnes of tuna during the whole of 2003. A super seiner fishing vessel would catch this much fish in just two days. Regulation of these fishing vessels is universally inadequate.

Industrial fleets fish indiscriminately. About 27 million tonnes of dead and dying ocean creatures, snared as unwanted bycatch, are thrown back into the oceans every year.

Overfishing is not just about running out of fish but the potential collapse of the entire ocean ecosystem. And it isn't only creatures beneath the waves that are at risk. Thousands of albatrosses die each year when, attracted by longline baits sitting just below the water's surface, they are hooked and drowned.

It is not too late to turn around the global fisheries crisis but governments must take urgent action to protect the species that remain.



Greenpeace activists from Fiji and PNG stand on juvenile tuna in the hold of a Philippine mothership. ©Greenpeace/Hilton.

## What we are doing

Greenpeace is campaigning globally to:

- > end overfishing, pirate fishing and destructive fishing methods such as bottom trawling;
- > end commercial whaling (see our *Save the Whales* fact sheet for more information);
- > set up a global network of marine reserves encompassing 40 per cent of the world's oceans.

In Australia and the Pacific, Greenpeace campaigns to:

- > strengthen effective regulation of distant water fishing fleets in the Pacific;
- > engage with communities in the Pacific to increase awareness and discuss effective action to protect the ocean;
- > strengthen national, regional and international agreements dealing with pirate fishing.



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## Overfishing in our region

Pacific fisheries are at a crossroads. One path leads to sustainable and equitable fisheries, a healthy marine environment and stable and prosperous island communities. The other path leads to the collapse of the major tuna fishery and loss of livelihood and food supply for the people of the Pacific. We have an opportunity to save the Pacific Ocean's ecosystem and support development without destruction in the Pacific.

The Pacific has one of the last moderately healthy fisheries in the world but its greatest threat is overfishing. As fishing stocks collapse in the north, fleets move en masse to the Pacific, rather than fix problems in their own waters. Distant water fishing nations and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) pirate fishing boats prey on fish in these waters, greedily taking as many as they can. These industrial distant nation vessels are taking 80 per cent of the catch in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. The financial return from access fees and licences to the region is a mere five per cent of the value of the fish caught in Pacific

Island waters.

The 20 Pacific Island states rely upon their oceans as a crucial economic resource. Tuna fisheries make up to 40 per cent of GDP for some island states and tuna is the primary protein source for their populations. The economic stability and health of Pacific Island communities is under threat.

Overfishing, overcapacity and lack of effective regulation must be urgently resolved at a regional and global level or key fish stocks will collapse. Left unchallenged, exploitation will destroy the ocean and Pacific communities will lose their greatest resource.

## Marine Reserves

A global network of marine reserves is required to address the threats from overfishing. These provide protection of whole ecosystems and enable marine life to recover and flourish. Marine reserves benefit fisheries because fish and larvae or eggs spillover from reserves into adjacent fishing grounds. Less than 0.5 percent of the world's oceans currently have any form of protection.

## Campaign History

**1989** Public outrage leads to a United Nations moratorium on large driftnets.

**1990** Greenpeace divers take the first underwater images of driftnet bycatch.

**1992** A worldwide ban on large-scale driftnets comes into force.

**1995** The UN agrees to a Fisheries Treaty.

**1997** Greenpeace supporters are instrumental in getting 17 species of albatross listed in the Endangered Species Protection Act.

**1998** The European Union bans all driftnets in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

**1999** The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea orders Japan to stop illegal fishing for southern bluefin tuna. Australia ratifies the UN Fisheries Treaty.

**2002** The Australian government nominates the Patagonian toothfish for listing in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

**2004** The Rainbow Warrior visits the Pacific to help governments, industry and communities protect the ocean from overfishing and piracy.

**2005** Greenpeace launches a year-long world campaign, Defending Our Oceans.

**2006** In the Pacific, Greenpeace works with fisheries inspectors from Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia to expose pirate fishers.

**2007** The Pacific Island Forum countries issue the Vava'u Declaration calling on the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission to urgently adopt additional measures to address the overfishing of yellowfin and bigeye tuna.

**2008** Greenpeace promotes marine reserves during the Defending Our Pacific ship expedition.

A new agreement to help protect tuna fisheries is signed by Pacific government parties to the Nauru Agreement.

## What you can do

When purchasing fish:

- > Ask your fish retailer where the fish came from and how it was caught. If they can't tell you or you are not completely satisfied with the answer don't buy the fish;
- > Avoid long-lived, slow-growing species such as sharks and deep sea species;
- > Consider eating less fish. Ultimately we will need to consume less fish whether that is through choice or the collapse of fisheries.

Learn more and take action at:  
[www.greenpeace.org.au/oceans](http://www.greenpeace.org.au/oceans)



*Kiribati fishermen off-load their catch of tuna. Large foreign industrial fleets threaten traditional fisheries of the Pacific.*  
 © Greenpeace/Behring.

## Support GREENPEACE

If you want to help defend our oceans, make your voice heard and become a Greenpeace supporter today.

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# 1800 815 151

or use our secure online donation form at  
[www.greenpeace.org.au/donate](http://www.greenpeace.org.au/donate)