

Tropical fish under threat

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Anemone Fish in tropical waters off Japan. Photo by Ian McLeod, Tropwater, James Cook University

New research shows there's been a rapid increase in the numbers of fish caught in the Tropics, raising questions about environmental impacts and the sustainability of the crucial resource.

The study, Wild Marine Catch is an 'early insight report' from the landmark State of the Tropics report, which will be launched by the Burmese Opposition Leader, Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma (Myanmar) on June 29th.

The State of the Tropics project brings together 12 research institutions from across the world, including Kenya's University of Nairobi and Australia's James Cook University.

The early insight report reveals that between 1950 and 2011, the global wild marine catch increased from 16 to 79 million tonnes. The Tropics accounted for around two million tonnes of the wild marine catch in 1950 (12%), rising to 32 million tonnes in 2010 (42%).

The proportion of the wild marine catch from the Tropics has increased rapidly since the late 1980s, reflecting both the steady decline in the catch in the rest of the world (partly due to increased aquacultural production) and rising production in the Tropics.

In the Tropics, South East Asia is one of the major producers, where the combination of population growth and rising living standards has contributed to strong demand for seafood.

- The wild marine catch in South East Asia increased from less than one million tonnes in 1950 to more than 18 million tonnes in 2010
- The majority of the increase was in Indonesia (up by 4.7 million tonnes)
- China (up by 3.0 million tonnes)
- Philippines (up by 2.2 million tonnes)
- Vietnam (up by 2.0 million tonnes)

Between 1988 and 2010, the wild marine catch increased by 450,000 tonnes per annum, although the rate of increase in the Tropics has fallen since 1996.

Disturbingly, the report notes that slower growth in the rate of expansion of fisheries reflects evidence that most commercially viable wild fisheries have now been exploited and many of the world's fisheries are severely overfished.

The increased proportion of overexploited, collapsed or recovering stocks, combined with limited scope to expand into new fisheries, means that many wild marine fisheries will not be able to increase production until effective management plans are put in place to rebuild overfished stocks.

For further information visit: <http://stateofthetropics.org/>