Villy Christensen of the University of British Columbia's Fisheries Centre reported at the AAAS meeting Feb 18th that an international team of researchers has found that that large predatory fish like tuna and cod have declined by more than two-thirds over the past century, while small fish like sardines and anchovies have doubled over the same time period. Of that decline in large fish, 54% took place during the last 40 years, when the big factory fleets really kicked into gear. In an interview with AAAS , Christensen explains what happened in financial terms:

The one and dominant reason for the decline is overfishing. Up to the 1970s, industrial fisheries were concentrated in the northern developed countries, but since then it has spread across the globe.

You can think of the fish biomass as our "capital in the bank" (fishing bank if you will). We can draw an interest from that capital every year. That's what we call "sustainable fisheries". But we have been eroding the capital year after year, and we are now left with so small fish stocks that the world catches are smaller now than they were in the 1980.

Christensen says that we're essentially fishing down the food web—removing the large predatory fish, which allows the smaller ones to proliferate undisturbed. But if we keep fishing down that web, eventually using the small fish to feed growing aquaculture operations, that could mean the end of the wild ocean. More here

TAGS: sustainable fisheries, fishing, Vily Christensen, AAAS, world fisheries, predator decline,fishing down the food web

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