Add Over-Fishing to the Huge Government Debt as Examples of How We Are Consuming Beyond Our Means

Curious Cat Science and Engineering Blog

Fish are hidden under the water so the unsustainable harvesting isn't quite as obvious as the unsustainable government debt but they both are a result of us living beyond our sustainable production. You can live well by consuming past wealth and condemning your decedents to do without. That is the way we continue to live. Over-fishing a century ago was not as obviously dangerous as it is today. But we have witnessed many instances of overfishing devastating the fishing economy (when the fishing is unsustainable the inevitable result is collapse and elimination of the vast majority of the food and income that previous generations enjoyed).

The normal pattern has been to turn to more aggressive fishing methods and new technology to try and collect fish as over-fishing devastates yields. This, of course, further devastates the state of the resources and makes it so recovery will take much much longer (decades – or more).

New research [1] shows the existing problems and the potential if we apply science and planning to manage fisheries effectively.
Using new methods to estimate thousands of unassessed fisheries, a new comprehensive study provides a new view of global fish stocks. The results show that the overall state of fisheries is worse than previously thought. Unassessed stocks, which are often left out of global analyses because of a lack of data, are declining at disturbing rates. When these fisheries are taken into account, the results indicate that over 40 percent of fisheries have crashed or are overfished, producing economic losses in excess of $50 billion per year.
The good news is that this decline is not universal: fisheries are starting to rebound in many areas across the globe and we can learn from these examples. Recovery trends are strongest for fisheries where data on the status of the fishery exists, and in which managers and fishermen have made science-based decisions and stuck with them in the face of political pressure.
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The amount of fish brought to shore could increase 40 percent on average – and double in some areas – compared to yields predicted if we continue current fishing trends.
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The management solutions to overfishing are well known, tested and proven to work. While these solutions are not "one-size-fits-all" for fisheries, there are common themes. Specifically, managers and fishermen must: 1. Reduce fishing to allow stocks to rebuild; 2. Set catches at a sustainable level that is based on the best available scientific and economic information rather than short-term political pressures; and 3. Prevent dangerous fishing activities that destroy habitat, wildlife, or breeding fish.

The over fishing problem is difficult because our nature is to ignore problems that are not immediate. But the costs of doing so are very large. If we don't behave more wisely our children will pay the price. And, in fact, this problem is so acute now that those of us that expect to live a couple decades can expect to pay the price. In rich countries this will be tolerable, a bit less fish at much higher prices. In rich countries food prices are a minor expense compared to the billions of those not living in rich countries. They will suffer the most. As will those that have jobs directly dependent on fishing.

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