

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Is creating a fish bank for the world a pipedream?

Closure of the high seas to fishing would deliver a fish bank for the world without downstream impacting of food security, revenues, and profits and losses for the global fishing industry.

It may seem a far-fetched idea, but that's the scenario painted by an international team of fisheries ecologists in a research paper appearing in the journal *Nature Scientific Reports* and published on Friday.

Australian co-author, Prof Reg Watson, from the University of Tasmania's Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, said the research has been prompted by an ongoing debate in the biological community of the value of services provided by Exclusive Economic Zone fisheries and those of the high seas, known as the Commons.

"We set out to determine the degree of overlap of fish stocks such as tuna, other highly migratory pelagic species, and deep-sea fishes that straddle the boundaries of national Exclusive Economic Zones and the high seas."

"The question that challenged us was how much the global take would change if catches of straddling species were limited only to the EEZ and the high seas were closed to fishing."

"Our finding is that closing the high seas could be catch-neutral, and the existing inequality in the distribution of fisheries benefits among the world's maritime countries could be reduced by 50%."

"Based on our analysis, we argue that it would be more equitable, and environmentally and economically sensible to close the high seas to fishing – in effect to turn the high seas into a fish bank for the world," Prof Watson said.

One bonus is that it would reduce costs for fishing companies and eliminate more than 1% of the world's carbon emissions generated by high seas fishing.

He said these results illustrate strong ecological and economic sharing between EEZs and the high seas.

The study involved Australian, Canadian, US, and British scientists. It was based on a decade of catch data collected between 2000 and 2010, and including data from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the International Council for Exploration of the Sea, regional tuna organisations, the North Atlantic Fisheries Organisation, and the Hobart-based Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

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