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Expert Task Force Recommends Halving Global Fishing for Crucial Prey Species

Forage Fish Twice as Valuable in the Water as in the Net

WASHINGTON – Fishing for sardines, anchovies, and other "forage fish" in general should be cut in half globally to account for their critical role as food for larger species, recommends an expert group of marine scientists in a report released today. The Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force conducted the most comprehensive worldwide analysis of the science and management of forage fish populations to date. Its report, "Little Fish, Big Impact: Managing a crucial link in ocean food webs," concluded that in most ecosystems at least twice as many of these species should be left in the ocean as conventional practice.

A thriving marine ecosystem relies on plenty of forage fish. These small schooling fish are a crucial link in ocean food webs because they eat tiny plants and animals, called plankton, and are preyed upon by animals such as penguins, whales, seals, puffins, and dolphins.

These species play a growing role in the everyday lives of industrialized nations. Their demand in recent decades has greatly increased for use as fish meal and fish oil to feed farmed fish, pigs, and chickens that people consume on a regular basis. Fish oil is also used in nutritional supplements for humans.

"Traditionally we have been managing fisheries for forage species in a manner that cannot sustain the food webs, or some of the industries, they support," says Dr. Ellen K. Pikitch of the Institute for Ocean Conservation Science at Stony Brook University in the United States, who convened and led the Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force. "As three-fourths of marine ecosystems in our study have predators highly dependent on forage fish, it is economically and biologically imperative that we develop smarter management for these small but significant species."

Small schooling fish are primary food sources for many marketable fish found around Asia. Yellowfin tuna and sockeye salmon, used often in sashimi and other popular dishes, rely heavily on forage fish as prey since more than 50 percent of their diet is made up of these species. The task force estimated that, globally, forage fish are twice as valuable in the water as in a net — contributing US$11.3 billion by serving as food for other commercially important fish. This is more than double the US$5.6 billion they generate as direct catch.

"More conservative management of forage fish means having more commercially valuable fish to catch and eat," said Dr. P. Dee Boersma, professor and director of the Center for Penguins as Ocean Sentinels at the University of Washington and task force member. "Fishing economies,

much like the predators themselves, greatly depend on healthy populations of these species."

Made up of 13 preeminent scientists with expertise in a wide range of disciplines, the Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force was established to generate specific and practical advice to support better management of forage fish around the world. This group of experts, with support from the Lenfest Ocean Program, synthesized scientific research and other information about these species and conducted original simulation modeling to reach their conclusions.

Find more information about:
Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force: *www.oceanconservationscience.org/foragefish*
Lenfest Ocean Program: *www.lenfestocean.org*

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The Lenfest Ocean Program supports scientific research aimed at forging solutions to the challenges facing the global marine environment. The program was established in 2004 by the Lenfest Foundation and is managed by the Pew Environment Group. www.LenfestOcean.org

The Institute for Ocean Conservation Science at Stony Brook University is dedicated to advancing ocean conservation through science. The Institute transforms real-world policy while pursuing serious science, both of which are essential for ocean health.
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