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Review: In a Perfect Ocean: The State of the Fisheries and Ecosystems in the North Atlantic Ocean

By Daniel Pauly and Jay Maclean

Reviewed by [Ryder W. Miller](#)
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Daniel Pauly, & Jay Maclean. *In a Perfect Ocean: The State of the Fisheries and Ecosystems in the North Atlantic Ocean*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2003. 178 pp. ISBN 1-55963-323-9. US\$50.00. Printed on recycled, acid-free paper.

Authors Daniel Pauly and Jay Maclean evaluate the causes and solutions to the current demise of marine food webs and their constituents, many of which still sadly wind up on our dinner plates. They relay that we are eating down the food chain, that is, because of the depletion of fish in the high trophic levels, we are also depleting lower trophic level fish and invertebrates instead. Some of the fish we can still find at the fish market may disappear, as fishing stock will continue to be depleted unless we do something drastic.

Though the book is not very detailed, one cannot argue with the general trends it outlines. Ocean life was once abundant, thought to have the potential to feed the hungry world. Mistakes estimating the amount of fish available and the sustainable yield, and over-fishing have led to the extirpation (local disappearance) and extinction of species. It also has led to the collapse of local fisheries, with those of the Atlantic being examined in this work. The book ends by suggesting actions that we can take to restore the ocean habitats and fisheries stock.

The authors use the convention of the report card to evaluate the state of the local fisheries and propose methods to improve the scores. They have evaluated the present stage by the following subjects grades: Long-term Productivity of Fisheries (F), Economic efficiency of the fisheries (C-), Energy efficiency of the fisheries (D-), Ecosystem status (F), and Effects of fisheries on marine mammals (D). The authors end by making five recommendations to rectify the problem: reducing fishing pressure, creating large marine reserves, eco-labeling, publicly exposing deliberate unsustainable and illegal practices and their perpetrators, and favoring small-scale and place-based operations.

In a Perfect Ocean is not bogged down in statistics, but documents a clear pattern of ocean abuse that we should seek to rectify. If we don't, the very fish we eat regularly will disappear and what we fish for instead will

disappear afterwards. The work is solely about fisheries management and does not go into depth about other marine habitat issues like pollution and habitat destruction. The authors deserve high grades for reminding us that we have left the problem unsolved for too long.

The work suggests that it would also be worthwhile for there to exist a term for those who don't eat fish (or only sustainably) for moral reasons. How about "nonpiscivore"? A visit to an aquarium, rather than a fish market, will remind us of those we have forgotten, our distant relatives under the seas, at our own loss.

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Ryder W. Miller <dolphin1965@hotmail.com> is a freelance environmental and science reporter who has been published in *Sierra Magazine*, *California Coast & Ocean*, *California Wild*, and *Hydrosphere*.