

Overfishing

Overfishing happens when we take fish out of the ocean faster than they can reproduce. Removing too many fish too quickly can have a cascade effect across the whole marine ecosystem.



Harmful practices



- **Trawling** is one of the most harmful fishing methods. Enormous nets are dragged through the water or across the seafloor. Vulnerable habitats are damaged in the process.
- **Gillnets** are walls of netting that drift in the water. Gillnets can be up to 3.2 kilometres long.
- **Some longline fishermen** use lines that can extend for up to 80 kilometers, with thousands of baited hooks branching off from the main line.
- **“Blast fishing” or “fish bombing”** is a destructive fishing practice that uses explosives to stun or kill schools of fish for easy collection. This illegal practice also destroys the surrounding habitat.

Effects



- **Food chain disruption**
The depletion of certain fish can impact the abundance and distribution of other species. This can affect the relationship between predator and prey fish and can eventually lead to the collapse of the ecosystem.
- **Bycatch**
Catching unwanted fish is called bycatch. Species such as dolphins and turtles are often caught and cast aside, which harms the biodiversity of the whole ecosystem.
- **Threat to local food sources**
Fish is the main source of protein for many communities around the world. Overfishing threatens the economies and food security of these communities.
- **Algal blooms**
Algae can have many benefits for an ecosystem, but the removal of a significant amount of fish who feed on it can lead to out-of-control algal blooms, which create toxins or dead zones (Microalgae combined with bacteria and cyanobacteria).

Solutions



- **Marine Protected Areas (MPA)**
MPAs are a key strategy for sustaining and restoring ocean ecosystems. Like a national park in the sea, MPAs ban or strictly limit fishing and other damaging activities.
- **Sustainable fishing management**
Regulating fishing methods and eliminating the use of the more harmful ones is one way to help mitigate the issue of overfishing.
- **International fishing regulations**
Banning commercial fishing that occurs in international waters is a good way to ensure a large area of the ocean is protected from overfishing.
- **Education**
Educating yourself and the public about the threats of overfishing can have an immense impact on tackling this issue worldwide.