

Article review



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Costello, Christopher, and Steven D. Gaines, John Lynham. “ Can Catch Shares Prevent Fisheries Collapse?” *Science*. Vol 321. Sept. 19, 2008. This is an intriguing article about a plan which may be successful in saving fish stocks. All around the world, fish stocks are declining. This is largely a result of over-fishing. For decades now, fishing technology has been improving and boats have been getting bigger and better at catching fish. The result is that we are now close to having an ecological collapse in the world's fisheries. Something must be done. The scientists who have written this article explain their idea. What they think will be most successful at solving this problem is implementing catch share programs more widely. Catch share are transferable fishing quotas that can be used at various times, often prolonging fishing seasons. In essence, fishermen own a portion of the fish stocks in any given fishery. The main point that the authors make is that putting catch share programs into effect dramatically reduces the chances that a stock will collapse. Based on the evidence they have found, they suggest it would be a good idea for more fisheries to implement this policy. The argument made by these men seems sound. They are all credible writers and their interpretation of the data makes sense. There are a few points, however, which bear critique. To begin with, what the authors are suggesting would dramatically change the way certain fisheries have been operating. By giving fishermen a private property right in the fishery, fisheries may become exclusively owned by rich corporations. There may be no way for smaller fishermen to get involved in a fishery if all the stock is privately owned by companies. Another difficult question that their policy brings up is how these rights in stocks are to be distributed. Once these programs are in place how do you decide who gets what amount of fish? It seems likely that

there are bound to be big argument about this subject matter. There is a larger philosophical issue at stake here. Should fish be privately owned? Can these public resources be sold to the highest bidder forever? It seems unfair. Nevertheless, the authors of this paper show that this method may be the only really effective way to conserve fish stocks at all. Clearly the status quo is not a very effective way of doing this. We need to look at the full picture in order to determine what is the best strategy to preserve our natural resources. It is clear that the research is quite comprehensive. The authors have used a variety of material from a wide array of sources: “ To test whether catch-share fishery reforms achieve these hypothetical benefits, we have compiled a global database of fisheries institutions and catch statistics in 11, 135 fisheries from 1950 to 2003.” Nevertheless, fisheries and ecosystems are incredibly complex and it may not be possible for even the most dedicated scientist to properly explain them. Overall, the authors of this article do their best to explain their evidence and their idea. There are a few philosophical quibbles with their approach, but their work is sound and sensible. It may be time to implement catch shares more widely.