

## Of fish and foul logic

by Walter Starck  
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**Australia has the third-largest fisheries zone in the world and the lowest harvest rate, at only about 3% of the global average. We import 70% of the seafood we eat, all of it from resources far more heavily impacted than our own. This is unconscionable. We pay for it by selling off non-renewable mineral resources and call it sustainable management. This is moronic.**

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We waffle on about the imagined “impact” of fisheries when they have the lowest impact of any means of food production and whatever we do not get from the sea must come from the land with much greater impact on nature. We obsess over “threatened” species when fisheries have never exterminated even a single species of marine fish or invertebrate. We fret over maintaining “biodiversity” when there is no evidence of any reduction in biodiversity anywhere in Australian waters.

The jack mackerel which the super trawler would be fishing are a small fast growing species which feeds on plankton low on the food chain. The 18,000 tonne quota available for the trawler comes to only about 5% of the estimated spawning biomass. The possibility of overfishing, or of any significant ecological detriment, is effectively nil.

Jack mackerel are a mid-water species which form dense shoals. Bycatch of other species is negligible. The concern about catching seals, dolphins and birds when fishing a midwater trawl can only be the result of complete ignorance or deliberate misinformation.

Over recent years the jack mackerel catch in Australia has only been a few hundred tonnes per year, largely as a byproduct of other fisheries. In New Zealand over the past decade the same species has provided an annual catch of between 32 to 47 thousand tonnes from a fishing zone only half as large as Australia’s and with only one-seventh of the more productive shelf area. The probability of Australian stocks being considerably larger than currently estimated appears likely

The supertrawler’s proposed fishing is an exploratory effort which, if permitted, would provide us with a much better assessment of the size and distribution of a significant potential resource. The Law of the Sea Treaty under which we exercise EEZ rights to this resource provides that if a nation does not utilise their EEZ resources other nations may petition for access to them.

Locking up vast areas of EEZ and restricting fishing to absurdly low levels while imposing heavy demands on resources elsewhere is not a “use” likely to be upheld in any petition to the World Court. Continued pandering to ill-informed Green demands may well lead ultimately to our under-utilised EEZ being opened to Asian fishing companies.

*Walter Starck is one of Australia’s most experienced marine biologists, with a professional career of studying coral reef and marine fishery ecosystems*