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Perspective

The Future of Fish Populations and Fisheries in Warming Ocean

Niels Thorup*

Department of Marine Science, University of Otago, Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

DESCRIPTION

The oceans are undergoing profound changes as a result of human activities, most notably climate change. Rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, deoxygenation, and changes in ocean circulation are altering marine ecosystems in ways that are both complex and widespread. These shifts present significant challenges for fish populations and the fisheries that depend on them. As oceans warm and ecosystems adapt, the future of global fisheries-an industry that provides food, livelihoods, and economic benefits to millions-depends on how effectively we can understand and manage these changes. This article explores the potential future of fish populations and fisheries in a changing ocean, examining how climate change is affecting marine life, the challenges for sustainable fisheries, and the innovative strategies that may shape the future of seafood production and ocean conservation.

Impact of climate change on fish populations

The health and distribution of fish populations are closely tied to oceanic conditions, and climate change is altering these conditions in multiple ways. Key drivers of change include:

Rising ocean temperatures: As global temperatures rise, the oceans are warming, with the rate of warming most pronounced in the upper layers of the ocean. Fish are highly sensitive to temperature, which regulates their metabolism, reproduction, and migration patterns. Many species are already shifting their distribution in response to warmer waters.

Tropical species: They are moving towards the poles, while species traditionally found in temperate and colder waters are moving toward the poles or deeper waters in search of cooler habitats.

Migration and breeding: Fish species that rely on specific temperature conditions for spawning, such as Atlantic cod and certain species of salmon, are facing disruptions in their breeding cycles. Warmer waters may cause mismatches in timing, leading to reduced reproductive success and altered population dynamics.

Species decline: Some fish species, particularly those with narrow thermal tolerances, are at risk of declining as their habitat becomes unsuitable. For example, cold-water species such as some cod and haddock face a direct threat as their preferred habitats warm beyond their survival limits.

Ocean acidification: The increase in Carbon dioxide (CO_2) in the atmosphere has resulted in higher concentrations of CO_2 being absorbed by the ocean, causing ocean acidification. This process reduces the availability of calcium carbonate, a key compound used by marine organisms like shellfish, corals, and plankton to form shells and skeletons.

Food chain disruption: The impacts of acidification on planktonic organisms, which form the base of the marine food web, are a concern for fish populations that rely on them for food. A reduction in plankton populations can result in a decline in fish stocks, affecting both commercial and recreational fisheries.

Fish physiology: Ocean acidification can also impair the sensory and motor functions of fish, making them more vulnerable to predators and less capable of finding food or migrating effectively.

Deoxygenation: As the oceans warm, their ability to hold dissolved oxygen decreases, and the expansion of dead zones is increasing. Fish and other marine life are forced to either adapt to these low-oxygen conditions or move to other areas, often resulting in reduced fish populations in affected areas.

CONCLUSION

The future of fish populations and fisheries in the changing oceans will depend on our ability to adapt to the profound shifts occurring in marine ecosystems. Climate change is reshaping the oceans in ways that affect everything from fish migration and reproduction to the health of ecosystems and the sustainability of fisheries. By adopting forward-thinking, ecosystem-based management, investing in innovative technologies, and encouraging international collaboration, we can navigate these challenges and build a more resilient future for both fish

Correspondence to: Niels Thorup, Department of Marine Science, University of Otago, Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand, E-mail: nielsthorup089@uo.nz

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populations and the people who depend on them. The future of fisheries is not one of inevitability but of choice-by acting now to address climate change and adapt to new oceanic realities, we can ensure that fish continue to thrive in our oceans and that fisheries remain a vital source of food, income, and cultural heritage for generations to come.