

Briefing on the Hill on rebuilding overfished stocks in the U.S.A.

by *Ussif Rashid Sumaila*

The U.S. Congress is currently working on the re-authorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The most controversial aspect of the re-authorization relates to provisions regarding the restoration of stocks declared overfished by the U.S. government. There is, therefore, an ongoing debate in Washington, D.C. on this issue. Andrew Rosenberg (University of New Hampshire) and I got involved in this debate when we were invited by the Lenfest Ocean Program to give a Congressional (Hill) Briefing in Washington D.C. on June 15 this year, based on our recent works

on the issue of rebuilding overfished U.S. fish stocks.

Rosenberg discussed his new study entitled, *Rebuilding U.S. Fisheries: Progress and Problems*, which documents successes and failures in fisheries rebuilding programs since the Magnuson-Stevens Act amendments were passed in 1996, and recommends ways to improve the success of the program. I presented my joint work with Lisa Suatoni, *Fish Economics: The Benefits of Rebuilding U.S. Ocean Fish Populations*, which puts a dollar figure on the U.S. government's current approach to rebuilding fish stocks and compares this to

the economic impact of other approaches.

The goal of the briefing was to provide information about issues contained in HR 5018 (The American Fisheries Management and Marine Life Enhancement Act) sponsored by Richard Pombo (R-CA), to re-authorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. It is expected to be put before the full House of Representatives for a vote, hopefully before the November congressional elections.

Both Rosenberg and I were delighted to see a very good turnout. There were a range of Hill staff present, mainly from the House side (as usual there were no Members in the audience). Also present were representatives from NOAA, EPA, USAID, World Bank, NGOs, etc. The audience was very engaged, posing lots of good questions – underscoring how critical this issue is right now, with debate expected in the House shortly.

The key messages from the

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Rashid Sumaila and Andy Rosenberg taking questions at the Congressional Briefing in Washington D.C., June 15, 2006.

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...rebuilding stocks quickly will not only benefit the fish, it will benefit fishing interests as well ...

two presentations include: (i) after 10 years, only 3 stocks have been rebuilt, and 82% of overfished stocks still need recovery; (ii) over half of the stocks undergoing rebuilding are still experiencing overfishing; (iii) if overfishing is eliminated, stocks can recover (in 37% of stocks, this is happening); (iv) rebuilding stocks quickly will not only benefit the fish, it will benefit fishing interests as well, at least in the medium and long term, because economic benefits to the commercial and recreational sectors could triple from current levels; (v) more jobs will be generated both from the fishing sector and downstream sectors with rebuilding; and (vi) more fish protein will become available to Americans from domestic U.S. waters should overfished stocks be rebuilt.



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The *Sea Around Us* website may be found at saup.fisheries.ubc.ca and contains up-to-date information on the project.

Darwin's Nightmare: to the Tanzanian government the nightmare is the film, not the Nile perch

by Jennifer Jacquet

In 2005, Lake Victoria's Nile perch fishery received high profile exposure with the release of the film, *Darwin's Nightmare*. International audiences praised the film but the Tanzanian government was not pleased.

Darwin's Nightmare, directed by Hubert Sauper, uses the Nile perch industry as a vehicle to explore social issues in the Mwanza district, the centre of the Lake Victoria fishery—rich in fish and yet one of the poorest regions of the country. The result, which has nothing to do with Darwin or evolutionary biology, includes painful scenes of street urchins, prostitutes and AIDS victims. Hygienic fish-processing plants that export Nile perch to the EU are juxtaposed with macabre images of the processors'

leftover carcasses hung to dry for local consumption. The climactic moment of the film occurs when the viewer finally discovers that the cargo planes that fly Nile perch out of the country come to Tanzania full of weapons to equip guerilla operations in neighbouring countries.

The film was highly acclaimed—nominated for an Academy Award and lauded by the critics [e.g., 1]. Some of the responses, perhaps imitating the film, were incendiary. A critic from *The New York Post* wrote, "Africa starves because corrupt governments own the natural resources and export them to buy weapons to keep their people at bay." Correspondents in an online chat room discussing the film [2] advocated

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The **Sea Around Us** project is a Fisheries Centre partnership with the Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia, USA. The Trusts support nonprofit activities in the areas of culture, education, the environment, health and human services, public policy and religion. Based in Philadelphia, the Trusts make strategic investments to help organisations and citizens develop practical solutions to difficult problems. In 2000, with approximately \$4.8 billion in assets, the Trusts committed over \$235 million to 302 nonprofit organisations.

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a boycott of Nile perch. This year the EU, which normally sends inspectors to examine the Nile perch processing plants for three days, announced it would send its team for eleven days.

The Tanzanian government, perhaps unsurprisingly, has reacted strongly against the film (a reaction quite different to that of the U.S. government after Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*). In the year following its release, the Tanzanian government has become *Darwin's Nightmare's* most vociferous adversary.

First, the government arrested people associated with the film (e.g., Tanzanian journalist Richard Mgamba). In August 2006, the Tanzanian government accused Sauper of hurting the country's image and decreasing sales of Nile perch in an official letter

printed in the national newspaper [3]. There is now a sponsored Internet link in opposition to the film, which includes the negative reactions to the film by the Tanzanian embassy in France and the Tanzania office of the IUCN. The website includes faked photos of Sauper arm in arm with Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, and notes, "lots of [Sauper's] scenes have been done at nights, which proves that he is a cheater and liar" [4].

In their open letter, the government conceded that the conditions in which some of the film's characters live are "appalling and unacceptable" but argued that Sauper "maliciously closes the eyes of viewers to the many benefits that the Lake Victoria fishery has brought to hundreds



Marine finfish in preparation for export from Mafia Island, Tanzania.
Photo by J. Jacquet

of thousands of people." The government noted the positive aspects of Nile perch, such as the industry's "big multiplier effect, which puts the total employment at about two million people deriving livelihoods in extended activities..."

This sentiment was the one voiced repeatedly as I visited fisheries offices, NGOs, and universities on my August 2006 trip to Tanzania. Everyone had an opinion on *Darwin's Nightmare* (one professor even gave a 20 minute speech describing the film's inaccuracies, only to finally admit he had not actually seen it). A government official pointed out that, while Western culture may not readily perceive the benefits of Nile perch to the local

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Material for *Darwin's Nightmare II*?

Since independence, the Tanzanian government has restricted finfish exports to promote food security. In 2005, the government opened the export sector for marine finfish belonging to 10 groups of fish listed below [10]. Anderson and Ngutunga [11] have already expressed concern. Sharks and rays show a low resilience to fishing pressure and many Tanzanian species are classified on the IUCN Red List. The minimum weight limit of 2kg is also not adequate for many species included in the groups of parrotfishes, snappers, and groupers. But, with permission to export, the small-scale sector has already drastically expanded. In 2005, 14 new landing sites emerged along the coast of Tanzania. The number of coastal fishers in 2005 increased by 10,500 from the census four years earlier, while 2200 vessels were added to the coastal fishery over the same time period [12].

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|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Tunas and kingfishes | 6. Sharks |
| 2. Carangids (jacks) | 7. Rays and skates |
| 3. Parrotfish and bluefish | 8. Soles |
| 4. Red snapper | 9. Marlins |
| 5. Groupers and rock cod | 10. Catfish |

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communities, there is evidence of improvements. For instance, some Mwanza residents now have metal corrugated roofing instead of thatched roofs. A professor explained that residents in the fish basin actually prefer the fish heads to the fillets.

The Tanzanian government had an opportunity to use Darwin's Nightmare to catalyze change

The attention in Tanzania was curiously centred on the Nile perch industry and insistence that it benefits local communities. The government letter, for instance, dedicated only one unconcerned paragraph to the weapons imports. In the film's press release, Sauper said, "I could make the same kind of movie in Sierra Leone, only the fish would be diamonds, in Honduras, bananas, and in Libya, Nigeria, or Angola, crude oil." Though the director intended the issue of the arms trade or effects of globalization to take precedence, somehow, in Tanzania at least, Nile perch consumed the limelight (in addition to haplochromines).

But the information in *Darwin's Nightmare* is hardly new. The film largely reiterated points about the Nile perch fishery documented in the scientific literature in the last 15 years. The ecological catastrophe was well-known (and published in reputable journals [e.g., 5, 6]), as was its social consequences. Researchers described the prioritization of foreign exchange (through Nile perch exports) over food security and the subsequent protein malnutrition in the lake basin communities [7, 8]. They discussed the migration of fishermen that contributed to the rise of the AIDS epidemic [9]. Yet, the film caused

controversy where the academic literature and even a related book (*Darwin's Dreampond*) had not.

The Tanzanian government had an opportunity to use *Darwin's Nightmare* to catalyze change. They had an opportunity to use the film to highlight inequity brought on by globalization, to emphasize again the need to reform trade and eliminate subsidies as well as to request aid from the Western world. Instead, they harassed participants in the film and vilified the director. *Darwin's Nightmare* has become their own.

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A dhow sets sail on the afternoon wind.
Photo by J. Jacquet

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Note: The Fisheries Centre hosted a screening of Darwin's Nightmare. Tuesday, September 19th, 4.00pm.

