

Modest fisheries reduction could protect vast coastal ecosystems

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A reduction of as little as five per cent in fisheries catch could result in as much as 30 per cent of the British Columbia coastal ecosystems being protected from overfishing, according to a new study from the UBC Fisheries Centre.

The study, by Natalie Ban and Amanda Vincent of Project Seahorse, proposes modest reductions in areas where [fisheries](#) take place, rather than the current system of marine protected areas which only safeguard several commercially significant species, such as rockfish, shrimp, crab, or sea cucumber. The article is published today in [PLoS ONE](#), an online journal of the Public Library of Science.

Using B.C.'s coastal waters as a test case, the study affirms that small cuts in fishing - if they happen in the right places - could result in very large unfished areas. For example, a two per cent cut could result in unfished areas covering 20 per cent of the B.C. coast, offered real [conservation](#) gains.

"The threat of over-fishing to our [marine ecosystems](#) is well-documented," says Ban, who recently completed her PhD at the UBC Fisheries Centre. "Our study suggests a different approach could reduce the impacts on fishers as well as helping us move towards achieving conservation goals."

Part of the reason for the research was to open a debate on how to meet conservation goals set during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable

Development, which included establishing a network of marine protected areas by 2012.

"With the current rates of progress, there is no chance of meeting our 2012 targets," says Ban. "Given that fishers recognize the problem of overfishing but often regard marine protected areas as serving only to constrain them, another approach must be found. That's why we undertook this study."

The research looked at spatial catch data from Fisheries and Ocean Canada for 13 commercial fisheries on Canada's west coast to show that large areas representing diverse ecoregions and habitats might be protected at a small cost to fisheries.

"Given the dismal state of many fisheries, we urgently need to identify alternative approaches to sustaining marine life while respecting the needs of fishers and fishing communities," says Amanda Vincent, Canada Research Chair in Marine Conservation at UBC and Project Seahorse director. "We have little to lose - and much to gain - in trying a new approach in areas where marine conservation remains inadequate. Our research is globally relevant."

Source: University of British Columbia ([news](#) : [web](#))

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