

New scientific organisation seeks to boost fishery management globally

A newly formed scientific advisory group plans to take the lessons learned from successful fisheries management globally and apply them to developing fisheries in the rest of the world.

The organization, the International Fisheries Information Network (I-FIN), debuted ahead of this year's SeaWeb Seafood Summit in Seattle, reported the association Saving Seafood.

Headed by internationally recognized marine scientists, economists, and fisheries managers, I-FIN hopes to be a global resource on where fisheries are being managed successfully, why they are successful, and how those successes can be adopted elsewhere.

"We've got a team of people who can provide the most authoritative, scientific advice on what's happening in global fisheries, and what has been shown to work to improve the performance of fisheries," said Dr. Ray Hilborn, professor of marine science at the University of Washington and one of the members of the I-FIN steering committee.

According to I-FIN, over the last several decades, fisheries in much of the developed world have quietly transformed themselves into global leaders in sustainable management.

In places like the United States, Iceland, and New Zealand, fishing mortality has been reduced, abundance of many fish species has increased, and more species than ever before are being harvested at a sustainable rate.

"The greatest insight that we've uncovered so far is that there are a lot of really sustainable fish stocks," said Chris Costello, professor of natural resource economics at UC Santa Barbara.

I-FIN stressed that successful fisheries, like those in the US, have several traits in common. Their fisheries are closely monitored and collect significant amounts of data, their management adheres to scientific advice, and their regulations are strictly enforced.

Nevertheless, the organisation recognised that many fisheries in the developing world are data poor, which, combined with weak enforcement, increases the likelihood of overfishing.

One of I-FIN's top priorities is to identifying and close these data gaps by looking at other methods, other kinds of approaches for advancing the understanding in what is going on with fisheries, and how they can improve fisheries for people's livelihoods.

The organisation points out that compounding this data gap is the unique challenge posed by small-scale fisheries, which make up around 90 per cent of fisheries in the developing world and have not traditionally been closely monitored.

I-FIN's current efforts are an outgrowth of previous efforts to monitor progress in fisheries management at the global level, particularly the RAM Legacy Stock Assessment Database. The information gathered by the RAM Database, particularly the positive developments, has helped I-FIN identify trends in global fisheries, and informs the organization's current message..

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