

Too Many People Chasing Too Few Fish

Trawler boats that cast huge nets into the sea catching loads of fish transformed the fishing industry. But as trawlers became more efficient and fishing became more lucrative, the amount of caught fish dwindled down.

Basically, fish can't reproduce as fast as they are being fished. Over time, fewer fish means less income for poor local fishermen, not to mention a potential extinction of entire fish species or a breakdown in marine ecosystems.

Southeastern Indian state of Tamil Nadu started imposing an annual 45-day ban on trawler fishing in 2001 to stem this unsustainable practice and help the ocean regenerate itself.

Two Dutch biology students, Eline van Haastrecht and Marjanka Schaap, became intrigued whether the ban works and decided to look into this [eco challenge](#) for their masters theses. Their project won this year's thesis competition sponsored by the World Bank and the [Amsterdam Institute for International Development \(AIID\)](#).

Van Haastrecht and Schaap examined the ban from ecological, economic and social perspectives to fully understand its impact and effect on both the fish and the people for whom fishing is the main source of income.

During a three month stay in Tamil Nadu, they interviewed local policymakers, scientists and fishermen.

They looked into the ban's impact on both the fish and the people who depend on them for their livelihood. They concluded that while the ban wasn't perfect, it was better than nothing.



ocean.


Most fishermen agreed that fish stock had been depleting rapidly and that something had to be done.

The two biologists also spoke with many fishermen who worked on trawlers boats and were directly affected by this ban. They weren't big fans of the ban, which translated into 45 days of no income, making it more difficult to feed their families. But they also agreed that something had to be done to restock the levels of fish in the

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The ban was started in 2001. It has been successfully enforced, because it only prohibits trawler fishing. Traditional fishermen, who outnumber trawler fishers, are still allowed to fish.

Van Haastrecht and Schaap received masters now and now they are ready to return to Tamil Nadu to continue with their research.

“We want to gain more insight about the extent to which fishing restrictions that benefit the environment are acceptable to the local communities,” they say.

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