

Sustainable Oceans & Seas



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SUSTAINABLE OCEANS & SEAS

Transcript

JOHAN NORBERG: Volcanoes of long ago thrust these islands up from the water, forming the country of New Zealand.

Today, four and a half million people, with a proud indigenous heritage blended with immigrants, cherish their land rich with native forests, majestic mountain peaks, bustling cities, hillsides spotted with sheep and cattle, and an abundant coastline teeming with fish.

DAVE MOORE: What an environment. It's actually a privilege to fish in a natural resource in New Zealand. Good weather, bad weather, we're outside doing it and loving every minute of it.

ROGER RAWLINSON: The most important thing I enjoy about fishing is we see dolphins and whales, and sharks and penguins and turtles, and you see all of these things.

NORBERG: It wasn't long ago that New Zealand was fishing its waters faster than the fish could reproduce. Stocks were in decline, and many fish species were in danger.

But New Zealanders turned their fishing industry around, setting an example for the rest of the world for growth, sustainability, and freedom. I'm Johan Norberg, and I'm here in New Zealand to share that story with you.

When you stand here on this land, you cannot help but marvel at the natural beauty. It's truly astonishing. It's hard to imagine that thirty years ago, New Zealand's ocean waters were on the brink of an ecological disaster. Fish populations were declining due to overfishing. Something had to be done—and something was done.

The people of New Zealand have a strong connection to the sea, deeply rooted in their history.

Maori first settled these islands. Crossing the Pacific, navigating by ocean currents and stars, they found their way from Polynesia to the shores of New Zealand.

Centuries later, the British arrived. In 1840, they signed the Treaty of Waitangi with several Maori chiefs from the North Island. The treaty granted the British sovereignty, but also recognized Maori rights to their ancestral lands and their fishing grounds.

PETER DOUGLAS: Fishing is an important part of Maori culture. There were birds here in New Zealand, but there weren't many mammals. There's not a lot of other things to eat, so fish played a big part in our lives for the first 1,000 years we were here, and it's going to play a big part in our lives for the next 1,000.

NORBERG (03:08): These are some of the most abundant scenic fishing grounds in the world. Fishing is both a way of life here as well as a major industry.

RAWLINSON: A lot of times, we'll work 24/7. So we won't get much sleep longer than two hours. So that's a big responsibility for the skipper and the crew, knowing that someone in America or Britain or Australia is going to eat this fish in about three days' time. That's got to be top-notch.

I left school when I was 17. So, I pretty much started fishing in our little dinghy. After a couple of years, our 12-foot Parker Craft dinghy was no longer useful for us, so we decided we'll get something a bit bigger. So, we got up to about 15-foot, which to me was a big boat, and we decided we'll set more nets, we'll catch more fish, we'll work harder, work longer, and that proved to be successful.

NORBERG: It's not only the Maori using these waters. Thousands of non-Maori fishers harvest the seas, as well. But there isn't an unlimited number of fish in the ocean, and indiscriminate fishing harms underwater ecosystems.

In 1977, New Zealand began the process of expanding its economic boundary from 12 to 200 nautical miles, and in 1982, when the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea formalized the 200-mile limit for all coastal states, New Zealand's fishing zone became one of the largest in the world. By that time, fisheries in other parts of the world were collapsing due to overfishing, so there was a huge demand for New Zealand's fish. Fishermen with every kind of boat, from 15-foot long-liners to giant factory trawlers, plied the ocean, catching as many fish as possible. New Zealanders, too, were in danger of destroying their own fishery.

DARRIN FABRICIUS: It was just a free-for-all. It was just a pretty wasteful process because there was a lot of fish caught.

MOORE: So collectively, the scientists had worked out that the fishery was actually over-caught.

NORBERG: It was clear that some species in the region were about to be completely wiped out. The entire ocean ecosystem would be impacted.

New Zealand's government had been regulating the fishing industry by mandating what gear could be used and how it could be used, but there were no conservation limits on

total catches. Many fishers simply ignored the laws, taking an “everyone else is doing it, too” mentality.

ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE: *There’s no future if the catches continue at the present rate and with the number of vessels that they are hammering away at the very small patch of fish that’s here.*

NORBERG: It was clear that the regulations weren't working.

GEORGE CLEMENT (06:09): So in the early 80s, we had a reforming government who looked to free up our economy, and in the case of fisheries, essentially what we did was we said we were going set a cap on the amount of fish, and allow the industry the flexibility to determine what method they use, and how they’re harvested.

NORBERG: In 1986, the government, scientists, and the fishing community worked together to come up with a new system called the Quota Management System, or QMS. The QMS would determine how many fish of each species could be harvested each year while ensuring fish stock sustainability. Catch limits were then put in place.

CLEMENT: And it became quite clear that the way forward was to move away from constraining people from fishing into enabling them to fish by putting in quotas and by setting up a new, but quite comprehensive, scientific regime to actually measure the stock sizes and then to estimate the sustainable yields.

NORBERG: But the QMS didn’t stop there. Each individual fisher or fishing company was allotted a percentage of the total harvest based on how much they had caught in the past. That percentage could be sold or leased like any other property right. Now, the fishers could trade, sell, or buy more quota based on their own individual needs. The incentive changed from catching as much as you can to making the best economic return on the catch within your quota.

MOORE: So, at that time, much younger fishermen wanted to keep building. So I thought I'll buy some quota, and at that time, five ton of quota was worth about \$12,000 a ton to buy—\$60,000, and my home was worth \$120,000. So, it was a big call to invest in a piece of paper for half the value of your home. My wife was very worried about it. To buy a piece of paper half the value of your home, she was not too happy about mortgaging the house to do that.

NORBERG: Just as there’s a limit to the land that’s available for development, there’s a limit to the number of fish and ocean space. With quota ownership, fishers gained a direct benefit from protecting the fish population and the ocean environment, much the same as farmers gain direct benefit from protecting their livestock and farmland.

And so, a fishery on the brink of disaster started making a comeback. The fishers achieved what previous regulations failed to accomplish. Dave's gamble to mortgage his house and buy more quota paid off. The \$60,000 quota investment he originally made is now worth nearly \$300,000.

MOORE (09:13): I've got six little long-line boats, long-lining for snapper, tarakihi, gurnard. Since the introduction of the quota system in 1986, I think the snapper fishery here has probably doubled, I think, according to the science. It's actually easier to catch fish now than it was pre-quota. QMS is really good for the fish.

FABRICIUS: You can actually catch a lot more fish for a lot more of the year.

RAWLINSON: And we've got a really robust system where we document every fish that we catch and the area that we catch it. If there is possibly overfishing in certain areas, they can decide we're going to drop the quotas for a year and see what happens. And that can happen quite simply and quite easily. So therefore, for us as a fishing industry, we can manage that ourselves without government intervention.

CLEMENT: One of the side effects is that you actually have very strong conservation ethics built in because conservation is good for business—because sustainability is good for business.

NORBERG: Brightly-colored streamers are hung from long lines to prevent seabirds from chasing the bait on the hooks. Other new techniques increase sustainability as well, like gill nets that minimize by-catch or acoustic pingers that warn endangered dolphins, keeping them safely away from fishing gear.

RAWLINSON: The first instance is to get the by-catch over while it's still alive, some of the skates, stingrays, some of the small snapper that might be still in there. I'll measure those out, and get those back ASAP to give them a chance to swim back.

CLEMENT: There was a concern around the world about bottom trawling. And in 2006, we went to the government and said, why don't we set aside 30% of that zone and exclude it from trawling?

MOORE: In the end, the discerning buyer around the world wants to know that not only is the quality great, they also want to know that their fish isn't being caught in a way that's harming any other parts within the sea environment.

TOM SEARLE: So what happens on board is crucial. As the fish comes off the line its like Jime spiked in the old Japanese technique, which means that the fish dies without any stress. We put it in straight in a polystyrene box and on a plane within hours of it coming off the water.

STEVEN ROSSO (12:01): We're in the world-famous Fulton Fish Market. We are known as the second-largest fish market in the world. On a daily basis, we'll move

anywhere from 100 to 300,000 pounds of fish. We've been buying fish from Lee products for the last 19, 20 years. What's unique about the fish out of New Zealand is the quality of the fish. At times, we can't get the quality this good from our local fish, which is about six hours away, and these are more than two days away. So that's one of the unique things. I don't know how the fishermen do it, how they preserve the quality of the fish, but the fish are fantastic.

SEARLE: There's been dozens, if not hundreds, of articles and coverage over the years about our amazing system, our QMS. And there's been peer-reviewed, independent articles comparing what we do versus the way other nations manage their fisheries, and we always come up right towards the top there.

NORBERG: Fishermen here have a unique connection to the sea, a sense of the past, and a commitment to the future. But it's perhaps the island's indigenous people, Maori, who hold the strongest connections.

RAWLINSON: We want to be here for a long time. So I've got my kids coming through. I want them to be able to say in 30 years' time, "Dad did the right thing." And then I'm leaving something for them for the future and their kids for the future.

NORBERG: Although Maori had been fishing these waters for 1,000 years, the Quota Management System initially didn't include them. So, they turned to the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi and took legal action. In 1989, Maori were granted 10% of the total allowable commercial catch. In 1992, Maori were further provided 20% of new species brought into the QMS.

CLEMENT: Through the settlement of treaty rights and through some very good business decisions, they're probably now in a position of more than 30% of the industry that either own or have control over, so they're major players.

NORBERG: New Zealand has shown that it's possible to fish profitably and sustainably. The key was to bring the fishers into the process. They know and care about the oceans surrounding their home, and they want these waters to continue to provide for themselves and their families.

Rather than regulating the fishing industry itself, New Zealand decided to scientifically calculate fishing limits that would optimize fish populations and then let the fishers decide how best to manage the catch. They all have to follow the rules, as in any industry, but now the rules are based on ownership and work.

RAWLINSON: You can fish year-round and know that you're going to make a good living knowing that the fish are always going to be there.

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