

Friday Nov 3 11:23 AEDT



The adage that there are plenty more fish in the sea may not be true much longer.

The world's fish and seafood could disappear by 2048 as overfishing and pollution destroy ocean ecosystems at an accelerating pace, US and Canadian researchers reported Thursday.

If current global trends continue, the loss of fish and seafood will threaten humans' food supplies and the environment, according to the most exhaustive study to date on the subject, published in the November 3 issue of the US journal Science.

"Our analyses suggest that business as usual would foreshadow serious threats to global food security, coastal water quality, and ecosystem stability, affecting current and future generations," the international team of ecologists and economists wrote in "Impact of Biodiversity Loss on Ocean Ecosystem Services".

The four-year analysis was the first to study all existing data on ocean species and ecosystems and synthesize them to understand the importance of biodiversity at the global scale.

"Whether we looked at tide pools or studies over the entire world's ocean, we saw the same picture emerging," lead author Boris Worm of Dalhousie University, in Canada, said in a statement.

Worm said the disappearance of species from ocean ecosystems had been accelerating.

"Now we begin to see some of the consequences. For example, if the long-term trend continues, all fish and seafood species are projected to collapse within my lifetime -- by 2048," Worm said.

"In losing species we lose the productivity and stability of entire ecosystems. I was shocked and disturbed by how consistent these trends are -- beyond anything we expected."

At this point, 29 of currently fished species were considered "collapsed" in 2003, that is, their catches have declined by 90 percent or more, he said.

"It is a very clear trend, and it is accelerating," he said.