



Overfishing: What Everyone Needs to Know

Ray Hilborn with Ulrike Hilborn. Oxford University Press, New York. 2012. 130 pages. US\$74.00 (hardcover), \$16.95 (paperback)

Overfishing: What Everyone Needs to Know is a summary of the topics and definitions associated with the sometimes controversial subject of intense fishing from the world's oceans, and could easily be called: *A Layperson's*

Guide to Understanding Overfishing. This book is part of the "What Everyone Needs to Know" series, which uses a question and response format to guide readers through the issues surrounding the topic of interest. We found the format somewhat constraining for a complex issue such as this one. The chapters in Hilborn's book can be divided into two categories: those that thoroughly detail one case study related to the topic of that chapter, and those that briefly cover several examples or topics related to the subject of the chapter. Each type of chapter has its strengths and weaknesses, either providing a very narrow and detailed focus, or a broad but brief overview. Both approaches often leave the reader feeling that the topic was not adequately covered, and at times with a skewed perception of the subject.

The book encompasses many topics in the realm of overfishing, from historical impacts to current recovery and management of fisheries. Examples of case studies include the harvesting of whales to describe "Historical Overfishing" and the Orange Roughy fishery to describe "Deepwater Fisheries." Conversely, the chapters on "Economic Overfishing" and "Marine Protected Areas" discuss their topics more generally, whilst using detailed definitions. Generally, we found that the broader overview approach allowed for clearer explanations of the subject matter than the case study method, but adding a specific example in the more general chapters would have provided better illustration of the topic. The case study chapters were easier to relate to and provided an appropriate example for the subject. However, by not providing a broader context, we felt that the discussion was too narrow and misled the reader about the breadth of the chapter's focus.

The first two chapters described the history of overfishing and employed whale harvesting as an example. Chapters 3 and 4 encompassed recovery and management of fisheries, to convince readers that not all hope is lost for global fisheries. Chapter 5 covered the economics of fishing to demonstrate that overfishing is influenced by social, as well as biological factors. Chapter 6 discussed climate and fisheries, more briefly than we thought appropriate, but arguably adequate given the intent and length of the text. Chapters 7–11 highlighted the

differences among various fisheries: mixed, high seas, deepwater, recreational, and small-scale and artisanal. Most of these chapters provided a specific example within each type of fishery, which would have been sufficient if a thorough definition of each fishery was given at the beginning of the chapter. The examples were appropriate, but improperly gave the impression that each fishery was characterized by one representative species. Chapters 12–15 covered illegal fishing, trawling impact, marine protected areas, and overall ecosystem impacts. These chapters were more supportive and defensive of current fishing practices. However, in certain instances this viewpoint appeared biased against those who believe overfishing is detrimental to the ocean ecosystem. The final two chapters together provided an adequate summary and synthesis of the book, leaving us with a well-rounded understanding of the status of overfishing around the world.

The depth and breadth of this book would most likely appeal to a reader with an interest in fishing, ecology, or natural resource management, but lacking significant background knowledge or experience in the topic. This book, and likely the series in general, is an appropriate way to provide a more balanced perspective to the non-expert who would otherwise receive information from other sources. Overall, *Overfishing* is a quick read and provides general information for those curious about the topic. The question and answer format and style of the book make the topic more accessible to the average reader, yet the incompleteness or lack of response to several of the questions makes this format less than ideal when discussing contentious issues such as overfishing. Furthermore, the complexity of overfishing may hinder attempts to create such a short summary. We felt that many of the chapters could have benefitted from minor formatting improvements to provide the reader with a more cohesive and informative view. Hilborn is obviously well-versed and experienced in this topic, and his book provides essential information to someone who is concerned about overfishing of the world's oceans. The book fills a niche in the market to make this often technical information more accessible to the general public, but not in an ideal format.

This review is the product of a collaborative effort among graduate students in a fisheries class.

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