



FORAGE FISH: FUEL FOR MARINE FISHERIES, MAMMALS AND SEABIRDS

In a 1997 episode of The Simpsons, evil tycoon C. Montgomery Burns claims that, under the tutelage of relentless environmentalist Lisa Simpson, he's become a benefactor of society because he sweeps hundreds of millions of fish from the sea, grinds them up, and turns them into "Lil' Lisa's patented animal slurry" - "a high-protein feed for farm animals, insulation for low-income housing, a powerful explosive, and a top-notch engine coolant." "Best of all," he boasts, "it's made from 100 percent recycled animals."

Few viewers would have realized how closely the episode mirrored reality.

H. Bruce Franklin, "Net Losses: Declaring War on the Menhaden," Mother Jones, March/April 2006

WHAT IS FORAGE FISH? Forage fish are food for other fish and marine life and are often referred to as "fuel for the food web" because without them the oceans could not support large populations of top predator fish such as swordfish, mammals such as whales and dolphins, and seabirds. While not all of these species are strictly fish, they are referred to as fish because that is how the National Marine Fisheries Service manages them. Examples of forage fish include: hake, herring, krill, menhaden, Pollock, sardine and squid.

HOW IS FORAGE FISH USED? Billions of pounds of fish are processed into fishmeal and fish oil to be used in poultry and livestock feeds, aquaculture feeds, and pet foods. Small quantities are caught and used as bait in commercial crab, lobster, and other fisheries. Forage fish are also used by recreational anglers as chum and as cut or live bait for sport fish such as striped bass, bluefish, king mackerel, sharks, and tunas. In many cases forage fish are not sold as human food.

WHY IS IT SO URGENT TO CONSERVE FORAGE FISH? The boom in global aquaculture is putting increased pressure on forage fisheries to increase supply as feedstock for farmed fish, among other uses. Without explicit measures to protect forage fish, many independent large-scale industrial fisheries remove unprecedented quantities of forage fish from the oceans year after year. In U.S. waters, forage fish fisheries dwarf all others in terms of tonnage caught. Forage fish predators simply cannot compete with today's high-tech, hyper-efficient industrial fisheries.

Protecting forage fish is vital to America's fisheries and marine wildlife. Anyone who likes to sport fish for striped bass, bluefish, tuna or salmon should care about forage fish. Anyone who makes a living fishing commercially for ground fish, rockfish or salmon should care about forage fish. All those who like to watch whales, dolphins, seals and seabirds, or who depend upon tourists dollars of those who visit coastal communities to enjoy marine wildlife, should care about forage fish. Without forage fish, none of these pastimes would be possible.

WHAT IS NEEDED? AN ECOSYSTEM-BASED APPROACH TO FORAGE FISH MANAGEMENT Currently there is no policy framework within the nation's federal fishery law to ensure that there are enough forage fish in the ocean. The Network is promoting the protection of forage fish as a first step towards an ecosystem approach to fisheries management. The Network is urging the National Marine Fisheries Service to amend its catch-setting guidelines to recognize the special role that forage fish play and provide fishery managers with specific direction on how to ensure that there are enough forage fish in the water to feed the fish, birds and mammals that rely on these species.

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The Marine Fish Conservation Network is the largest national coalition solely dedicated to promoting sustainable management of marine fish and wildlife, and our oceans. The Network, made up of almost 200 environmental groups, commercial and recreational fishing associations, aquariums, and marine science organizations, uses its distinct voice and the best available science to educate policymakers, the fishing industry, and the public about the need for sound marine conservation and best marine management practices.