

A new book has been published examining the application of the precautionary principle and the ecosystem approach in Australian fisheries management.

**Overfishing under regulation:
The application of the precautionary
principle and the ecosystem approach
to Australian fisheries management.**



Dr Jonathan Nevill

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Overview:

This book explores the idea that poor fisheries management - and the economic and ecological damage which follows - is largely the result of management failures to implement important strategies to account for uncertainty. The two most important of these strategies are the precautionary principle and the ecosystem approach. After investigating the implementation of these strategies in Australian fisheries case studies, the author concludes that implementation is at best incompetent, and at worst dishonest. However, the case study of the southern ocean krill fishery, managed by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, provides an important exception. Other case studies include the Western Rock Lobster fishery, the Northern Prawn fishery, the Orange Roughy fishery, and South Australia's abalone fishery. The central conclusion of the book is that steps must be taken to bring about radical change in the cultures which exist within fisheries agencies. This could be achieved, the author argues, by replacing fisheries management agencies with agencies charged with managing marine biodiversity assets

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About the author:

Currently the director of OnlyOnePlanet Consulting (specialising in aquatic conservation policy) Dr Jonathan Nevill is an environmental scientist, planner and policy analyst with a lifelong interest in the conservation and management of aquatic ecosystems. His wide experience includes scientific research as well as hands-on work in a variety of policy development and environmental management situations with State Government environment agencies. Jon has published about 70 short papers and co-authored seven major reports. He coordinated the preparation of a major scientific statement on marine protected areas in 2008, and was part of a team which developed a statement on scientific principles of MPA design, in 2009. He is a member of the IUCN *World Commission on Protected Areas*, and a former councillor of the *Australian Marine Science Association*.
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Abstract:

The author argues that overfishing, a fundamental cause of the crisis facing our oceans, is the result of the failure of our fishing management agencies (ultimately our politicians and communities) to embrace a small suite of powerful tools (more correctly strategic approaches) which have been developed to account for *uncertainty*. Broad success in managing fisheries to achieve sustainability goals will (he argues) only come *if these tools are enthusiastically applied*. Moreover, the author suggests that this will not happen until organisational cultures within fishery management agencies undergo a major shift. The only way this shift will occur is for asset-based biodiversity conservation, rather than resource exploitation, to be placed at the centre of ocean governance. This book examines these issues in the context of case studies covering regional, national and provincial (State) fishery

management agencies. With the exception of the case study of a regional fishery (the southern ocean krill fishery under CCAMLR's management) all case studies are drawn from Australian experiences. Commercial and recreational fisheries are considered.

The study finds strong rhetoric amongst Australian fisheries agencies supporting application of the precautionary and ecosystem approaches. However, in the case studies examined, there is little evidence for enthusiasm (on the part of managers) for actually applying the approaches in a thoughtful or comprehensive way. CCAMLR provides an outstanding exception to this observation. Examples are discussed showing that agencies have published false and misleading information apparently to create an impression that these approaches are being effectively implemented. The author speculates as to the reasons behind this behaviour, suggesting that the explanation lies in cultures within fisheries agencies which condone incompetence and foster dishonest reporting.

The central recommendation of this book is that fishery management agencies, worldwide, should be replaced by biodiversity asset management agencies. While recognising that many factors affect biodiversity assets (some well outside the control of current fishery agencies) such a strategy would mesh with the increasing acceptance of integrated coastal zone management, and in general the need for integrated and precautionary management of natural resources.