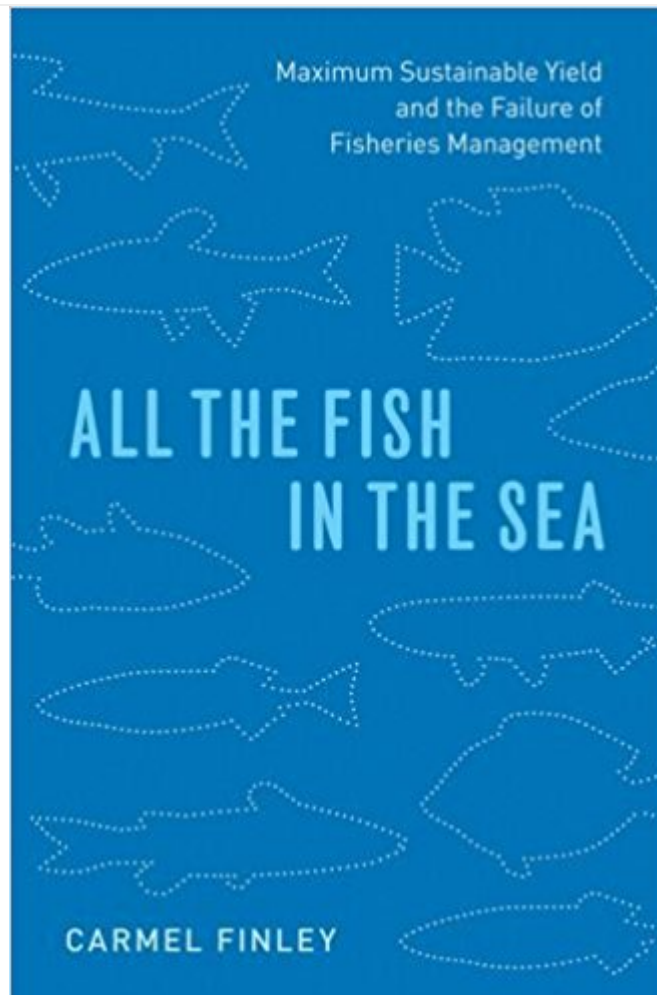


{essays in history}

The Annual Journal produced by the Corcoran Department of History at the University of Virginia

All the Fish in the Sea: Maximum Sustainable Yield and the Failure of Fisheries Management



Volume 45 (2012)

Reviewed Work(s)

All the Fish in the Sea: Maximum Sustainable Yield and the Failure of Fisheries Management. By Carmel Finley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Pp. 224. Cloth, \$35.00.

Over the twentieth century, the oceans' fisheries have proved less resilient than many fishermen, policymakers, and marine scientists once believed. Declining fish populations affected rich and developing nations alike. With too many fishermen competing over finite resources, conflicts erupted when nations threatened to restrict access to their waters. Designed as a tool to address these problems, maximum sustainable yield (MSY) was the idea that an annual restriction on the number of animals harvested would protect the long-term viability of fish populations.

MSY failed spectacularly in this regard, according to Carmel Finley in *All the Fish in the Sea*. The monograph focuses on the response of the United States to the competition posed by Japan over tuna and salmon in the Pacific Ocean from the 1930s through the 1950s. The author argues that MSY originated as a political tool that privileged closely-allied American foreign policy and fishing interests over long-term, scientifically-grounded understandings of population fluctuations. By 1955 MSY's advocates in the United States had persuaded a majority of the international community to recognize MSY as a legal concept, scientific principle, and conservation goal of international fisheries management, with disastrous consequences that remain in effect today.

All the Fish in the Sea joins a growing body of work that seeks to historicize the scientific, social and political factors that have made fishing such a precarious enterprise.^[1] In this important contribution to marine environmental history and history of science, Finley deftly uses a range of primary sources, including diplomatic papers from the State Department and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, publications such as *Marine Fisheries Review* and *Pacific Fisherman* to represent the scientific and commercial fishery

communities, and the personal papers of leading American ichthyologists, such as William F. Thompson and Wilbert M. Chapman.

In building on the existing literature and integrating various primary sources, the author demonstrates how a small group of U.S. scientists and diplomats framed long-distance oceanic fishing as a critical state-sponsored project with enormous Cold War implications.

Considering the importance of these arguments for scholars and practitioners in fisheries management, *All the Fish in the Sea* might have elaborated on the ways in which the categories of science, politics, and economy were interwoven within this history. Sometimes, the argument elided the relationships among these categories. For example, the author details how some British and Japanese marine scientists challenged the assumptions that supported MSY as overly optimistic, unsubstantiated by research data, and too simplistic at the Rome 1955 International Technical Conference on the Conservation of the Living Resources of the Sea. Although Finley quite skillfully shows the complexity and conflict in this scientific debate, the British and the Japanese also operated within specific cultural and economic contexts that shaped how they envisioned their scientific practice. More discussion about those contexts would have enriched this terrific work.

All the Fish in the Sea presents a fair and nuanced history of what has become one of the most important marine conservation tools, MSY. To address the problem of fisheries in decline, researchers and policy makers from history, science, and policy would benefit from engaging with this well-crafted, interdisciplinary work.

Jennifer A. Martin

University of Wisconsin-Madison

[1] Arthur F. McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Tim D. Smith, *Scaling Fisheries: The Science of Measuring the Effects of Fishing, 1855-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Kurkpatrick Dorsey, *The Dawn of Conservation Diplomacy: U.S.-Canadian Wildlife Protection Treaties in the Progressive Era* (Seattle:

University of Washington Press, 1998); Joseph Taylor, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Helen M. Rozwadowski, *The Sea Knows No Boundaries: A Century of Marine Science Under ICES* (Copenhagen: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea in association with University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2002); Matthew McKenzie, *Clearing the Coastline: The Nineteenth-Century Ecological & Cultural Transformations of Cape Cod* (Lebanon, N.H.: UPNE, 2011).



Published by

 [View all posts by](#)

Book Reviews

20th century, Environment, Global History, Science

COMMENTS ARE CLOSED.

FIND US ON:

» [Facebook](#)

» [Twitter](#)

ADMIN:

» [Log in](#)

» [WordPress.org](#)

PROUDLY POWERED BY WORDPRESS | **THEME: BASKERVILLE 2 BY ANDERS NOREN.**

UP ↑