



Responding to our critics

Is the growth of aquaculture putting pressure on feed fish stocks?

The fishmeal industry is subject to much negative and unfair criticism. IFFO defends the industry's reputation and refutes these criticisms with arguments based on sound science and facts. But these criticisms may well be made directly to you, our members. To help you stand up to the critics, Update will include a series of articles giving you the ammunition you need.

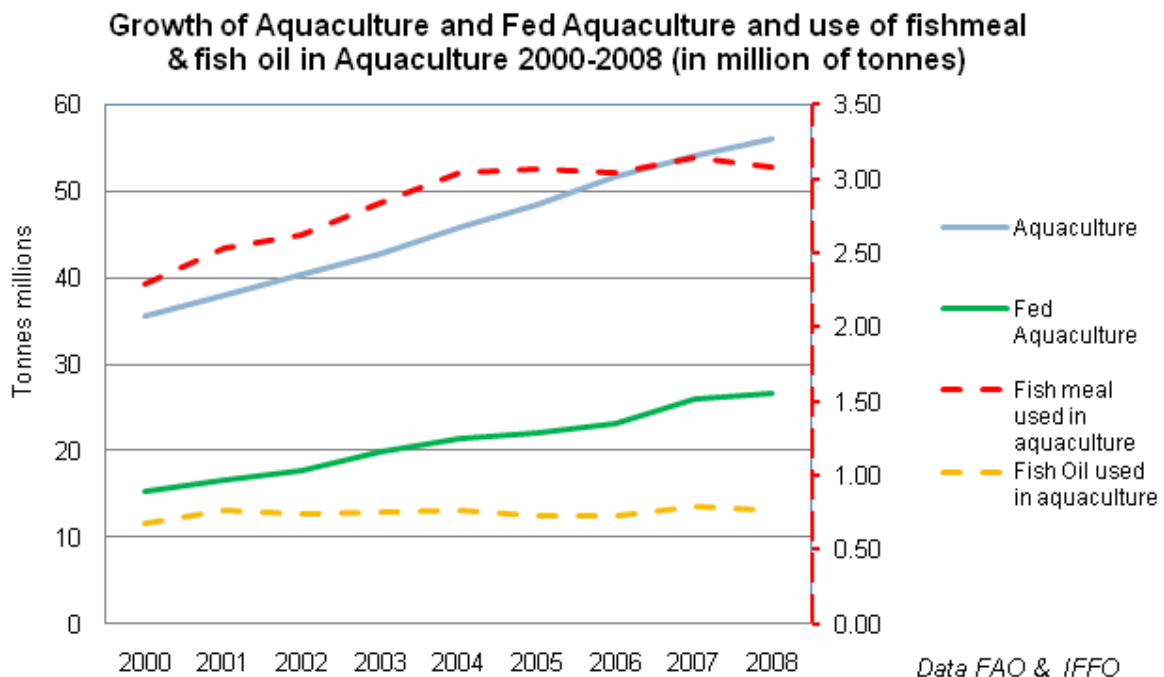
This first article addresses the criticism that expanding aquaculture will inevitably result in destruction of feed fish stocks.

Q. What exactly is the accusation?

A. In the critics' words - aquaculture output is growing at 8-10 per cent per annum worldwide. Farmed seafood diets include fishmeal and fish oil. As aquaculture continues to expand, it will require more and more fishmeal and fish oil - very soon, demand will overtake supply. Then aquaculture growth will stop and at the same time continued pressure of demand will result in overfishing and hence severe and irreparable damage to the stocks.

Q. How should we respond to this?

A. Mainly by demonstrating that this criticism is simply not true. Show the critics, or concerned customers.



The blue line shows the expansion of world aquaculture and, more relevantly, the green line shows the expansion of fed aquaculture (i.e. aquaculture involving the use of compound feeds). Both show steady expansion since 2000.

But then look at the red and yellow dotted lines which show use of fishmeal and fish oil in aquaculture globally over the same period. Use of fish meal (red) has not increased since 2004 - it has levelled off.

Use of fish oil (yellow) has been static since 2000.



So the criticism that expanding aquaculture is demanding more and more fishmeal and fish oil is just plain wrong. Fishmeal and fish oil are being used more efficiently, more strategically at lower levels and in part substituted by alternative ingredients. The total amount required has levelled off.

Q. What other points can we make?

A. The public, the value chain and critics are understandably concerned that fish stocks are being depleted and the marine environment irreparably damaged. They have frequently been told that “80% of world fisheries are fully or overfished”. So it’s not surprising they assume that feed fisheries (otherwise known as ‘industrial fisheries’) are over-exploited.

Increasingly the days of unrestricted feed fishing are over. Controls to protect fish and the wider environment are in place and kept under constant review. Peru, for example, was rated best country in the management of its fishery resource (mainly anchovy for feed) by a 2008 report from the University of British Columbia. In addition the fishmeal and fish oil industry launched an independently audited certification programme in 2009 (IFFO RS). Within a year more than 20% of global fishmeal and fish oil production capacity had achieved certification, hence demonstrating responsible sourcing of the fish raw material.

Q. But the critics will still say that industries are a lot more interested in profit than the environment and so remain motivated to encourage overfishing.

A. Maybe a few still think like this and there is certainly scope for improvement in south east Asia. But the vast majority of fishmeal producers (IFFO members) have made substantial capital and business commitments for the long term. This means they need fish this year, next year and each year into the future. Harvesting the stocks sustainably is very much in their commercial interest.

It is also worth pointing out that 25%, and rising, of our industry’s raw material is recycled trimmings from processing fish (wild and farmed) for human consumption. Our industry returns this ‘waste’ to the food chain.

KEY POINTS

- 1. Fishmeal and fish oil are not limiting, and will not limit, the growth of aquaculture.**
- 2. The growth of aquaculture is not putting pressure on wild feed fish stocks.**