



A school of Gold-Spotted Trevally (*Carangoides fulvoguttatus*) off eastern Salomon atoll

Chagos Archipelago No Take Zones

Since before the discovery of vast amounts of cod in the West Atlantic centuries ago, fishers have killed over 90% of all the fish in the planet's seas¹, most to eat, but fully 20% discarded into the sea as waste.

Attempts to manage fisheries to sustain this bountiful source of protein have in the main been abject failures².

Fishers have systematically killed the larger animals such as whales and then moved down the size scale until only small and immature fish survive. When catching these becomes unprofitable, new species of fish are hunted in far away parts of the high seas using every modern technique. Species after species has been all but wiped out.

In the process, bottom trawl nets, ever bigger, have almost completely destroyed fish habitats. Now bare sand, gravel and mud is all that is left where once existed forests of vegetation and coral sheltering myriads of little fish and other marine animals providing food for the larger predators.

Nearly all has been lost, but in the last 30 years it has been shown conclusively that the setting up of **No Take Zones**, from which nothing can be removed or extracted by humans, allows fish to recover remarkably quickly³. Not only do the fish recover but also the fishers adjacent to the zones see their takes rise³. For sustained recovery it has been shown that some 30-50% of fish habitats need to be systematically protected³. To its credit the BIOT Government in drawing up the Chagos Conservation Management Plan accepted in principle the need for No Take Zones. In 2007 a study funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, based on information obtained during research in 2006, provided for the zones to be accurately delineated and this has been done. The necessary legislation will follow.

As well as being based on biological information, the proposed No Take Zones include all the Strict Nature Reserves already designated and take into account present use by visitors and most previously inhabited areas as well as those which are potentially inhabitable, in order to avoid conflicting demands on use and future use⁴. Identified zones are Colvocoresses Reef, Blenheim reef, the area enclosing the Strict Nature Reserves of Eastern Peros Banhos and Nelson Island, the region encompassing the Strict Nature Reserves of the western Great Chagos Bank plus Egmont atoll, and Ganges Bank in the south. This is expected to be sufficient to conserve the fish, particularly for inshore fishers, and for any future inhabitants of the islands. The area thus protected is likely to ensure that good stocks of reef fish continue indefinitely.

¹ Roberts C. 2007. *The Unnatural History of the Sea* Gaia Octopus Publishing Group.

² Ludwig D, Hilborn R, Walters C. 1993. Uncertainty, Resource Exploitation, and Conservation: Lessons from History. *Science* 260(2):17.

³ Roberts, C.M. and Hawkins J.P. 2000. Fully-protected marine reserves: a guide, WWF Endangered Seas Campaign, Washington.

⁴ Chagos Conservation Management Plan, chapters 3 and 10 - see www.chagos-trust.org.

The **Chagos Conservation Trust** is a charity (Registered in the UK No. 1031561) established in 1992 whose aims are to promote conservation, scientific and historical research and to advance education concerning the archipelago. The Trust is a non political association.

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