Masked, diluted, drowned out: missing feedback signals from marine ecosystems to global markets affects governance success

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Abstract

Nearly 40% of seafood is traded internationally and an even bigger proportion is affected by international trade yet scholarly work on marine issues has focused mainly on global trends in stocks and catches or on dynamics of individual fisheries, neglecting to address the ways in which these are linked through trade. This paper highlights how local-global connections affect transmission of signals about the state of fisheries and marine ecosystems to global consumers and back. Price of seafood could provide a signal but current characteristics of fisheries systems and global market structures combine to weaken such price signals. We highlight why this occurs and how signals of decline remain hidden from consumers. The identified mechanisms represent a key challenge for sustainable fisheries governance and need to be understood to address the interactions of global seafood trade and marine ecosystem change.

Keywords: marine, social ecological system, governance, feedback, cross, scale, trade, off