

Editorial

The End of the Line?

I was recently sent the DVD “The End of the line” to review (see page 64) and watching it filled me with equal parts of admiration and trepidation - admiration for the quality of production which deals with such evocative facts in a calm and positive way and trepidation for the undeniable message it imparts.

Having dived consistently in the waters around Plymouth here in the UK for over 30 years I have definitely noticed a deterioration in the amount and quality of the marine life. True, we have local influences such as the inconsiderate (actually illegal) dumping of dredged material from the approaches to Devonport Dockyard which has affected visibility and smothered marine life in Whitsand Bay but I can't help but feel that large fishing boats offshore have taken so much from the local waters that the balance of the marine life has been affected.

“The End of the Line” DVD points out that there are no longer any commercially viable stocks of cod in Newfoundland yet they had sustained local livelihoods and fed a nation for thousands of years. Now they have

been fished literally to extinction – a point at which there is no possibility of the species in that area ever recovering i.e. they have disappeared forever.

Closer to home, when I visited the local maritime museum in Polperro just a few miles down the coast in Cornwall, I saw old photographs of the conger eel catches which took place on a daily basis about 100 years ago. There were photographs of mounds of them, literally mounds. Now I don't know about you but I am always a bit wary when I stumble across a conger eel underwater so it's just as well Cousteau and his aqualung came along when it did for, if it was a century earlier, the underwater world would perhaps not have seemed quite so enticing but I digress.

Man has the capability to catch almost every large fish in the ocean and he is merrily doing so but to the general public there is no tangible visual evidence of this happening. Nothing to see of the scale of change and perhaps it is us, the underwater photographers and cameramen, who are partly to blame.

We are able to create images which, in certain circumstances, distort the truth and leave a message of contentment. For example we can photograph the one remaining small coral head in a desert of sand which was once a vibrant reef, get the sun behind the one remaining piece of colourful soft coral, light it with a twinkle of fill in flash and we have a beautiful but unrepresentative image.

Now I'm not suggesting for a moment that competitions add a new category “Worst seabed shots” but it is only when public perception is made to realise that time really is running out for the fish and eventually the life in our oceans.

If we can change that perception there is a chance, a slight chance, that we may be able to put the brakes on, enough to avert a terminal, man-made disaster.

Peter Rowlands
peter@uwpmag.com

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