

Most animals are slaughtered at sea

At least 63-76% of all animals slaughtered annually were caught by fisheries [see Table 1], another 22-33% were farmed in aquaculture, whereas only 2-4% were terrestrial animals. And we are talking about animals in the trillions per year, more precisely 2,260 to 3,500 billions (2,260,000,000,000 to 3,500,000,000,000 animals per year) — not including the unknown but certainly high numbers of wild and farmed molluscs.

Table 1: Number of animals slaughtered per year			
in trillions	Category	Source	in %
1.100-2.200	Wild finfishes	[1]	Fisheries at least 63-76%
0.317-0.484	Wild crustaceans	[2]	
???	Wild molluscs cephalopods, mussels, etc.)	?	
0.130	Farmed finfishes	[3]	Aquaculture at least 22-33%
0.630	Farmed crustaceans	[4]	
???	Farmed molluscs	?	
0.082	Farmed terrestrial animals	[5]	2-4%
at least 2.260-3.500	Total animals/year (without molluscs)		

compiled by think.fish (2025)

The welfare of aquatic animals should be explicitly addressed not only because of its overwhelming proportion of animals slaughtered, but also because all human activities in the oceans (and lakes, and rivers) increasingly jeopardise the lives of all animals living in the planet's last great wild resource. Whilst we cannot be certain that the conservation of the oceans will bring with it the welfare aquatic animals, we can assume that focussing on the welfare of these animals will entail the welfare of their habitats. If the welfare of aquatic animals were a priority, many human activities in the oceans would have to be significantly reduced (e.g. industrial fishing, ship transport) or banned altogether (e.g. deep sea mining).

References

- [1] <https://fishcount.org.uk/fish-count-estimates-2/numbers-of-fish-caught-from-the-wild-each-year>
- [2] <https://end-of-fishing.org/ja/wild-caught-crustaceans-numbers/>
- [3] <https://fishcount.org.uk/fish-count-estimates-2/updated-farmed-fish-crustacean-estimates>
- [4] https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/farmed-crustaceans?country=~OWID_WRL
- [5] <https://ourworldindata.org/data-insights/billions-of-chickens-ducks-and-pigs-are-slaughtered-for-meat-every-year>