

# Global appetite for frogs' legs could see them croak

THE insatiable global appetite for frogs' legs could cause them to croak, according to an international team of scientists.

The problem: Frogs' legs are no longer eaten on a small scale, at certain times of the year.

The delectable amphibians have hopped onto the menus of French school cafeterias, Asian market stalls and American diners – serving a year-round, international trade.

At least 200 million and maybe over one billion frogs are consumed every year (only a fraction of the total trade is assessed in world trade figures).

Overharvesting is a major worry which could lead to frogs becoming extinct, the researchers warn.

"Amphibians are already the most threatened animal group yet assessed because of disease, habitat loss and climate change – and man's massive appetite for their legs is not helping," said one of the scientists involved, ecologist Corey Bradshaw, of the University of Adelaide, in a statement.

"The absence of essential data to monitor and manage the wild harvest is a large concern," said Associate Professor Bradshaw, who is also senior scientist at the South Australian Research and Development Institute.

Indonesia emerged as the largest frog exporter, with 31 million to 160 million frogs killed annually for export between 1989 and 1998.

The industry employs thou-

sands of people and also supplies a domestic market estimated at two to seven times larger than its export market.

The United States and Europe were major importers, with Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia taking the lion's share of Asian demand.

The team, which studied global trade patterns over 20 years, is calling for a mandatory certification process to be put in place for the harvesting of wild frogs' legs.

It also wants to ensure that such harvesting is carried out sustainably, via a system similar to one used for crocodiles under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites).

"It is the moral duty and responsibility of importing, developed countries to assist with such a programme's implementation, because many frog-exporting countries lack the necessary institutional capacity and financial resources," they wrote.

The work – which was also carried out

by researchers from Canada's Memorial University of Newfoundland and Harvard University in the US, together with Professor Navjot Sodhi of the National University of Singapore's Department of Biological Sciences – will be published in the journal *Conservation Biology*.

The bad news for frogs is piling up.

Scientists have found that the creatures, which exist in small geographic ranges with high temperature and rainfall fluctuations, are sensitive to pressures such as global warming.

There are about 6,000 known frog species and it is estimated that about one-third to half may become extinct in our lifetimes.

If this happens, it will be the largest mass extinction since the disappearance of the dinosaurs.

