

Pushed into a corner

Some of the crucial issues facing the artisanal fishing sector in Chile were discussed at the recent CONAPACH Congress

The 15th National Congress of Chilean Artisanal Fishermen, organized by CONAPACH, took place in Talcahuano, in the south of Chile, in November 1996. This Congress discussed developments over the previous two years since the launch of a national programme of action.

The Congress represents a unique and traditional meeting space for fisher organizations in Chile and allows policies to be decided for the following year. The meeting is an indication that the process of organization and social cohesion is still very important for the development, not just of those directly involved in the sector, but of the nation as a whole.

There are now 60,000 people involved in the artisanal fishing sector in Chile, with total catches rising to 811,000 tonnes in 1995. The state of the resource is still a concern and there are many challenges to be faced. CONAPACH exists to develop the artisanal sector in Chile and to strengthen the level of organization within this sector of the national fishing industry. The role of the State and organizations has been expressed in the evolution of a specific artisanal fishing policy which guides the development of the sector.

The opening address of the Congress pointed out one of the most salient issues in discussing artisanal fishing in the Latin American context: neoliberalism and its impact. It is felt, in Chile at least, that neoliberal (or monetarist) policies have forced artisanal fishing into a corner by requisitioning use rights that have traditionally resided with the artisanal community. ITQs (Individual Transferable Quotas) are seen as a product of these neoliberal economic policies. Artisanal fishing existed in Chile long before the Spanish arrived in the 16th Century, and

Don Hugo Arancibia Zamorano, and the then National President of CONAPACH, giving the opening address at the Congress, expressed a desire to see it continue to exist into the 21st Century.

In 1994, CONAPACH had launched an extensive national action programme which had four main pillars: (i) organization as a prerequisite for development; (ii) unity as a central element of any progress; (iii) the need for a development policy for the artisanal sector; and (iv) the need to decentralize CONAPACH. In an attempt to demonstrate that this action programme was being put into practice in a real and evident way, the 15th Congress was held in the south of Chile, rather than in the capital.

The basic document for the development policy for the artisanal sector was signed in the presence of the President of the Republic in August 1995. This was a historic moment, as it was the first time that representatives of the State and the artisanal sector got a recognized agreement and a set of guidelines for the process of development based on other political and technical points of view. The fundamental part of the development policy aimed at improving the conditions of the communities and the fishermen, through policies concerning the arrangement for artisanal fishing and the strengthening of fishing institutions.

Framework in place

Although the document had no immediate discernible effect, the framework is in place (such as the revised 1991 Fisheries Law) for progress to be made. One of the most crucial elements of the new relationship between the State and the artisanal sector is the establishment of the artisanal fishing zone that extends for five miles offshore.

However, because the State views economic interaction between the industrial and artisanal sectors in this area as the norm rather than the exception, CONAPACH is still striving to plug the 'holes' in the five-mile exclusion zone.

As a reflection of the decentralization of CONAPACH, it was stated that there needed to be consultations with the three macro-zones in the country (representing the north, the centre and the south—three very different geographic and climatic zones) to ensure that this was the stated objective of all the regional institutions.

The programme of action initiated in 1995 had also stated the need to increase artisanal fisheries' representation in the Fisheries Council which informs and comments upon government policy. Although a development fund was established under the 1991 Fisheries Law, because it is currently funded by fines and only an inadequate State contribution, it is unable to respond to the sector's needs. As a regulatory mechanism, the 1991 Fisheries Law has seen a decrease in the number of violations, but the number of cases reaching court is still too low, and there are insufficient facilities for inspection.

A relationship with the Ministry of Public Works was written into the development policy with regard to modernizing harbour infrastructure in bays and inlets. This involves a programme of investment and the development of inland transport. The hope is that this relationship will help prevent traditional artisanal harbours being developed for the benefit of tourism or industrial fishing. It is strongly felt by CONAPACH that bays and inlets used by artisanal fishermen are not just geographic features, but also form the roots of communities and represent complex economic, social, cultural and political spaces. In order to drive this idea to the forefront of government policy, CONAPACH has participated in the formation of the national coastal zone management policy.

Whether or not artisanal fishermen should become micro-enterprises is a key question in the sector at the moment and

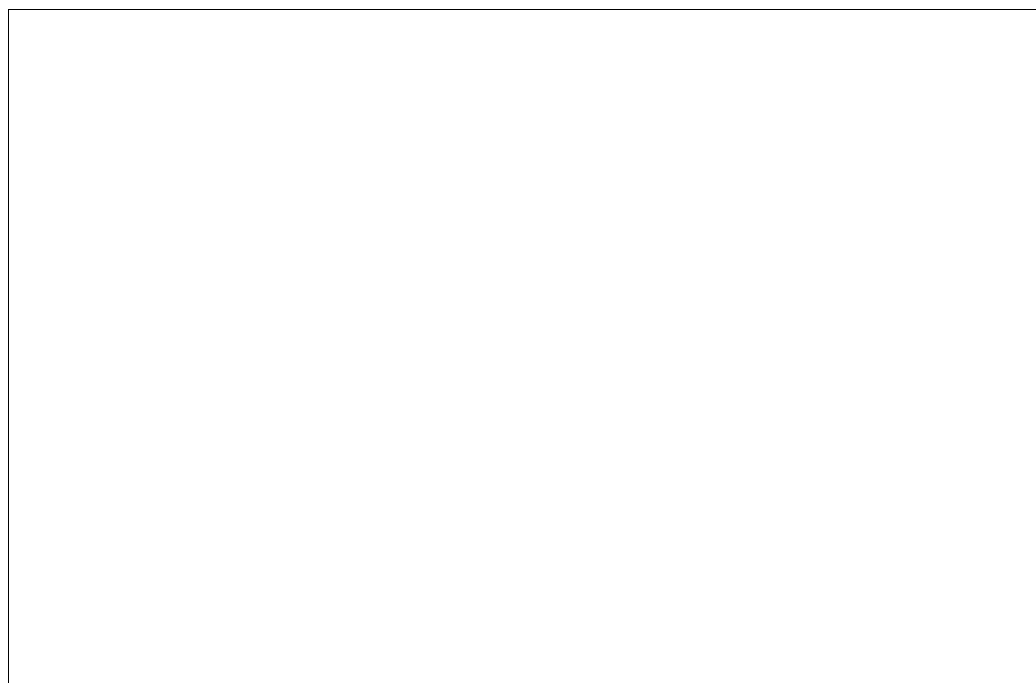
derives from the concerns about neoliberal economic policies. This issue has also arisen because of the difficulty that fishermen have in gaining access to finance from public and private banks. CONAPACH argues that artisanal fishermen can develop adequate marketing strategies by maintaining a solid union between the organizations, and that there is no need for them to abandon this traditional structure.

The 'development policy' element of the action programme focused on enabling local organizations to improve their level of participation. CONAPACH has encouraged the creation of Regional Committees for Fisheries Development, which are official counterparts to articulate specific policies to the State. There are currently seven such committees in Chile. There were several workshops held at the Congress dealing with various aspects of artisanal fishing. The recommendations and conclusions of these workshops (all of which follow from the above discussion) are detailed below.

With regard to the five-mile exclusion zone, CONAPACH declared that it will never allow industrial activity in this zone and demanded that the law be changed to remove the articles on industrial activity and bottom-trawling that allow these breaches to happen. The Environment and Research Working Group argued that CONAPACH should be able to rely upon a body of efficient and suitably qualified environmental scientists who can give necessary assessments to organizations faced with the problem of pollution. Regional workshops were proposed to improve the amount of environmental data available—both with regard to pollution and to the state of the fish stock. CONAPACH defends bays and inlets as a fundamental part of the fishermen's heritage and as the building blocks of artisanal fishing. With regard to the critical situation in some bays, non-transferable property rights should be granted on 99-year leases for the exclusive use of artisanal fishing organizations.

Aquaculture projects

Artisanal fishing organizations are now involved with aquaculture projects but need improved training in this field.



It was proposed that a network for exchange of information on prices and markets in Santiago, the capital of Chile, be set up along with a national model of co-ordinated sales of fish products from small and medium producer centres.

It was suggested that fishing be introduced into the education programme and that grants for children of artisanal fishing families be established to give them access to higher education. It was also felt that a maritime museum should be set up to record the history of artisanal fishing in Chile.

Due to their comparative isolation, rural fishing bays are at a disadvantage as far as development is concerned. They also fail to attract government money because of the lack of expertise to put forward projects. An improved base of technical advisers is needed to remedy this situation. The lack of co-ordination between the State and fishermen with regard to development projects is considered to be a major problem within the artisanal sector in Chile.

It is felt that there is no collective consciousness about artisanal fishing problems and that there is a lack of understanding of management problems by members of the organizations. Having agreed that there is a lack of attention paid to the role of women in the sector, a

women's department within CONAPACH was proposed.

CONAPACH urged the government to encourage increased national consumption of the artisanal catch which is, overall, very significant to the country's fish production.

Recommendations made

Various technical recommendations were made with regard to benthic, pelagic, demersal and aquaculture resources. Most of these recommendations urge the government to look into the issue of declining catch rates, and ways of preserving the resource. On aquaculture, the government was urged to change the rates charged for concessions: seaweed and salmon producers face the same charges despite the great disparity in profitability of the two types of production.

This summary of the report resulting from The 15th National Congress of CONAPACH (Congreso Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile) was written by Elizabeth Bennett, MSc Fisheries Management student at the University of Portsmouth, England.