

The roar of the sea lion

When nature conservation efforts grow irrational, the results can be disastrous, as shown by the case of the sea lions off Peru

According to FAO, there are 116 species of marine mammals in the world. Of these, 60 are found in the South East Pacific (Ecuador, Chile, Peru). It is commonly recognized here that the pinnipeda compete with fish for resources. The pinnipeda in Peru comprise the southern fur seal (*Arctocephalus australis*) and the southern sea lion (*Otaria byronia*). The latter, because of their great numbers, pose a huge problem for the artisanal fisheries.

In Peru, this is a particularly significant problem and, since 1970, when the Ministry of Fisheries was created, it has received greater government attention. Yet, 27 years after the creation of the Ministry, only three multisectoral official commissions have been constituted to tackle the problems created for fishermen by the sea lion.

Since 1991, Peru's artisanal fishworkers have been represented by the Federation for the Integration and Unification of the Artisanal Fishworkers of Peru (FIUPAP). The Federation is very actively involved in developing and promoting the artisanal sector. It has a representative in the seven-member official commission (with the National Director of Artisanal Fishery as chairman) constituted to determine "actions to diminish the interference of the southern sea lion in the artisanal fishery."

According to the census by FIUPAP and IMARPE (Instituto del Mar del Peru) in 1995-96, there are 6,258 artisanal fishing vessels, of which 2,500 have an average capacity of 2.5 gross registered tonnage (GRT), using drift-nets to fish for species like Peruvian silverside, eastern Pacific bonito, lorna drum, cabinza grunt and palm ruff. Peru's artisanal sector includes vessels up to 30 GRT.

The total population of Peru's artisanal fishworkers, including those in the coastal and continental areas, is 45,000. Of this, 40 per cent fish without vessels,

A comparison of the figures for the number of artisanal fishing craft and southern sea lions justifies the call to regulate the growth of the southern sea lion population through a rational cull.

Year	Artisanal Vessels	Sea Lions
1971	4,700	30,054
1981	5,171	49,185
1990	5,960	103,562
1997	6,258	195,000

IMARPE recommended the harvest of 2,800 and 4,500 sea lions in 1984 and 1992 respectively, based on the principles of a Plan of Global Action for Marine Mammals developed between 1978 and 1983. During a meeting of experts in Costa Rica in 1995, the Peruvian delegation, represented by IMARPE, recommended legislation for a programme to control the population of southern sea lions and also to curtail their interaction with the fisheries through means that do not negatively affect their population.

Environmental groups

However, these recommendations have not been applied in Peru, mainly due to pressures exerted by national environmental groups which resist any action to control the population of southern sea lions. Worse, these groups do not furnish alternative solutions for this problem.

Granted that these days the trade-environment nexus is an important and controversial subject internationally. Yet, in the application of unilateral


measures under the pretext of environmental protection, there seem to be forces working against the commercial interests of Peru. The access of its artisanal fishery products to the markets of developed countries would be affected.

The southern sea lion does not figure in international conservation agreements because its survival is not in danger. On the other hand, the negative economic impact on the incomes of the fishworkers and communities of Peru is not taken into account, nor is the significant contribution of artisanal fishery to global nutrition security.

A preliminary study by FIUPAP has estimated the annual damage caused by the southern sea lion to the artisanal fleet at US\$64 million. FIUPAP is now evaluating the economic impact on other techniques of fishing, so as to assess the larger economic consequences.

Although Peru's artisanal fishery receives support from FONDEPES (National Fund for Fisheries Development), there is very little investment in credit programmes for equipment, vessels or diversification of the fishery. In 1995 and 1996, these investments amounted to only US\$3 million and US\$6 million respectively.

Considering that fishing is the second most important economic activity after mining, the negative impact of the sea lions on the incomes of Peruvian fishermen is considerable. Artisanal fishworkers are those principally concerned with maintaining an adequate ecological equilibrium in marine areas. The survival of these communities depends on the availability of marine resources. While we recognize the rights of marine mammals to live in the sea, we must not forget to maintain some sort of equilibrium.

In Peru, however, no such equilibrium is sight. The situation appears set for a struggle for survival, in which the greatest damage would be precisely to the environment. In such a scenario, the blame should not be hurled at artisanal fishworkers but at the mercenaries of the conservation movement, who misunderstand the relationship between conservation and development. 

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Peru

