

# Not just the cherry on the cake

**Gender mainstreaming and anti-discrimination measures form central planks in President Michelle Bachelet's policies for Chile. This article discusses how Chilean women in fisheries are benefiting from the new measures**

This article has been compiled by **Brian O'Riordan** (briano@scarlet.be), Secretary, ICSF Belgium Office, from various sources, including Conapach (www.conapach.cl), Tribuna del Bío Bío (www.tribunadelbiobio.cl) and Subpesca (www.subpesca.cl)

**E**lected in January 2006, Michelle Bachelet is Chile's first woman President. Her election marked a milestone in the process of national reform, from dictatorship under the brutal Pinochet regime to democracy. Her father was tortured to death by Pinochet's secret police. She and her mother were also imprisoned, but managed to escape rape, torture and murder, unlike thousands of less fortunate women.

On being elected, she pledged to bridge the gap between rich and poor and to give women and indigenous people a greater voice in Chile. Central policy planks of President Bachelet's programme include gender mainstreaming and antidiscrimination. Eighteen months since she took over, and 12 months before a new round of Presidential elections, these policies are being implemented in the fisheries sector.

At a conference in Valparaíso in November 2007, an initiative was launched to establish a network of women in fisheries in Chile: the National Network of Women in Artisanal Fisheries and Small-scale Aquaculture. The conference, the First International Meeting of Women in Artisanal Fishing and Small-scale Aquaculture, was co-organized by the Fisheries Sub-Secretariat and the Federation of Artisanal Fishing and Seafarers, FEPAMAR, from Region VIII.

Maria Torres, General Secretary of FEPAMAR, explains: "Around 12 international women fisher leaders were present at the Conference, joining some 80 women leaders from Chile. We found that, six years after our last meeting, some organizations had disappeared, while others were doing well". Apart from providing a forum for exchange of experiences, the purpose of the meeting was, in Torres' words, to "get the public services involved with artisanal fisheries, to become more engaged with the sector", highlighting that "women are not behind artisanal fishermen, but at their side, helping with fisheries activities as much on land as at sea."

According to Maria Torres: "Traditionally Latin American societies have been organized

along patriarchal lines. This has come about as a consequence of male dominance in the public spaces that govern the economy, policies and society, with women being relegated to private domestic life. In the work place too, women's work is often seen as mere support activity, which conceals its real importance. Women fail to be taken into account in national statistics or research, which has meant their exclusion from government plans and public policies. This has resulted in inequitable policies, and what is more, insufficient attention to issues of great priority for the artisanal fishery and their communities".

On 5 August 2008, in Valparaíso, a co-operation agreement was signed between the Service for Women's Affairs (SERNAM), the Fisheries Sub-Secretariat (SUBPESCA), and the Fisheries Service (SERNAPESCA). Present at the signing ceremony were women representatives from the artisanal fishing sector. These included the President of Conapach, Zoila Bustamante, Maria Torres, the Secretary of FEPAMAR from the VIII Region, and Gladis Alvarado from the Hualaihué Syndicate from Region VIII.

This agreement aims to disseminate information and provide training on the issue of women's rights. It envisages direct contact between men and women stakeholders in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, with particular attention to consultations with women associated with fishery and aquaculture activities.

According to Maria Torres: "As far as the integration of women within the artisanal fisheries sector is concerned, while in the North there continues to be much *machismo*, in the Central zone women are more prominent due to their presence at sea as seaweed gatherers and fishers. Towards the South, women are even more visible, sailing and handling their own vessels, setting out to sea for up to 15 days, with risky weather conditions and the inherent problems that fishing conditions present daily."

The agreement, according to Torres, is an important landmark. "In less than a year, thanks to our persistent demands, SUBPESCA, SERNAM and SERNAPESCA have signed an agreement through which they will attempt to fulfill the Presidential mandate of reaching out to the people, instead of forcing the people to go to them. This will help the large number of rural *caletas*, from where women travel for many hours to reach the offices of SERNAPESCA and other government agencies. Women from the



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islands too face problems in accessing public services. So if public services go to them, it is a great achievement.”

On 30 October 2008, in Valparaíso, an anti-discrimination initiative in the fisheries sector was launched. The General Sub-Secretariat of the Chilean Government and the Sub-Secretariat of Fisheries signed a co-operation agreement to implement a plan of action to promote respect for diversity, tolerance and nondiscrimination in both the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, as well as in technical teams and in the public sector.

One of the programmes to be implemented is the *Subpesca en Terreno* (Subpesca on the Ground), which will address the demands for information and training of stakeholders all over Chile.

The Chilean Government views gender discrimination as being the result of violence and poverty. For this reason, says Torres: “the President of the Republic has given top priority to the social agenda for making the country more humane and more inclusive”.

In her speech during the signing ceremony, Zoila Bustamante, the President of Conapach,

highlighted the importance of the issues to be addressed through the agreement, and called on the Government to ensure that in future, artisanal fishers are invited in their own right and “not just as the cherry on the cake”. Said Bustamante: “What we are hoping for is that from tomorrow onwards, when we work with the government, with the Fisheries Sub-Secretariat, we do it because we want to conserve the resources in the sea, so that in future we don’t have to survive on handouts; so that we can continue fishing and working, not waiting at home to be told that they will give us our basic needs”.

In her closing remarks, the representative of the Fisheries Sub-Secretariat, María Angela Barbieri, said: “The Fisheries Sub-Secretariat has heard the call of the President of the Republic, and has established, as a strategic priority, the inclusion and strengthening of the gender perspective as a central part of its policies and institutional tasks”. It is vital, she said, for the constitution of a country to stimulate leadership capacities and self determination, not just for men, but also for women.

For Maria Torres, these agreements are an important step towards getting the National Network of Women in Artisanal Fisheries and Small-scale Aquaculture off the ground. Says Torres: “They will help to strengthen organizations of women and to train leaders; to generate new collaboration agreements with public and private bodies, and launch other initiatives. Plans are in hand to organize regional meetings, where women can get to know each other and through undertaking participative regional analysis, to articulate their concerns and proposals in various spheres.”

The first such regional meeting took place in Arica on 20 October 2008, and it is planned that meetings will be organized in 14 of the 15 Regions of the country, culminating on 4 February 2009 in Concepción. ▀