

# Round-up...

## Stock management and regulations in Kerala

or THE SMALL FISHERMAN AGAINST THE TRAWLERS

Ever since 1976, the small-scale fishworkers of Tamil Nadu (South East India) have staged spontaneous and violent demonstrations against the 32-foot trawlers which have, with impunity, been destroying coastal resources. Since that time, Southern India has witnessed a series of uprisings in its coastal regions. The Government has responded by setting up various committees to look into the problem—to no avail. In 1978, following the formation of the National Fishermen's Forum, the demand was made for Marine Fishing Regulations. As a result of this the Central Government directed the State Governments to enact legislation to control marine fishing.

In 1981, Kerala State enacted its "Marine Fishing Act", under which the state is authorized to conserve fish resources, protect the interests of fisherfolk and direct fishing initiatives. The Act imposes a ban on purse-seiners fishing within 22 kilometres of the coast and on trawlers and mechanized boats within 10 kilometres, and prohibits operations between sunset to sunrise. Violations are punishable by fines of up to 50,000 rupees and subsequent violations by the impounding of boats. To help enforce the Act, the police have been given three speed boats.

The enactment of the law can be seen as a direct result of the sustained action taken over a number of years by small-scale fishworkers. In Cochin, for example—a major fishing port where all the purse-seiners and some 500 trawlers operate—small-scale fishworkers adopted outboard engines in 1986, enabling them to put up a stronger fight which culminated in a blockade of the entire harbour on September 11, 1987.

This action was not pursued universally by the small-scale fishworkers: over the period 1978 to 1986, some fishworkers actually supported the purse-seiners as they derived some benefit from them. But collective action finally resulted in the Act being passed and a meeting being called by the District Collector to which all parties concerned—the owners of the purse-seiners and trawlers, the police and the small-scale fishworkers were invited to work out a way of implementing it.

The District Collector decided that the three speed boats which had been allocated should monitor any possible violation of the law, and another—stationed at the mouth of the harbour—should monitor infringements of the Act relating to night-fishing (mechanized boats are not permitted to leave the harbour before 4am and must return by 9pm).

The entire process was not an easy one: many complaints were lodged by the mechanized boats against the small fishworkers, which were acted upon by the police; but at the same time, the police and fishery officials were obliged to enforce the law by catching vessels violating its regulations.

### CONCLUSION

The lesson to be learned from this example is that unless the small-scale fishworkers put up a sustained fight, no law will be enacted or implemented.

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