

## Comment

# After the sound and fury

Who in the world of fisheries could have ignored all the sound and fury generated by the recent fish war between Canada and Spain the passion, the venom, the rhetoric, the drama? Certainly not SAMUDRA. To reflect, as objectively and topically as possible, the many dimensions of the issue, this edition contains five articles that focus on the 'Turbot War', putting forward differing points of view from Canada (including one from the Minister of Fisheries), Spain and the UK.

Readers, understandably enough, might wonder why a South-based Report should devote so much space to a conflict over fish stocks in the far North between two rich industrialized countries like Canada and Spain. The answer lies in the simple fact that fisheries problems cannot be viewed in isolation. Fisheries crises in one part of the world are a threat to fish stocks and artisanal fishing communities anywhere else in the world. This truth has only become more apparent with each successive crisis.

The enormously excessive global fishing capacity and the increasing technological sophistication in harvesting and processing methods have shrunk the world's oceans into one large lake, so to say, placing fishing grounds around the world under the threat of predatory and unsustainable fishing practices. The huge subsidies in the industrialized countries combined with a dangerous clause in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea that total allowable catch in excess of a country's capacity to fish would be made accessible to other states ensure that the powers that those vessels have to deplete stocks will be efficiently transferred to underdeveloped parts of the world. These resources, unfortunately, fall mainly within the jurisdiction of the countries of the South.

Given the compulsions of global capital, market forces are clearly incapable of any 'affirmative action' against 'inelastic' stocks under pressure of collapse. To maximize return on investment, the large fishing vessels of the world, left to themselves, will only rake and sift the sea columns for all commercially valuable species, ravaging one fish stock after another.

Fishworkers in Africa, Asia and Latin America are already concerned about a plethora of fisheries agreements and joint ventures that are being entered into, especially with the European Union. Given the very meagre and often erroneous data on fish stocks, the poor understanding of prey-predator relationships, and the impact of fishery-dependent and independent factors, as well as the almost non-existent monitoring, control and surveillance mechanisms, the potential impact of these agreements and joint ventures can be devastating for the artisanal fishing communities.

As Monica Justo from Galicia points out in her article elsewhere in this issue, the writing on the wall is very clear: there is no more 'freedom' of the high seas and distant-water fishing nations should start training their fishworkers to meaningfully adapt to a new way of life which would imply taking up non-fishery related activities. By the same token, coastal states can not now continue to pile the blame on distant-water fishing states whenever there is a crisis within the 200-mile zone.

In the 'turbot war', this seems to be the time of a ceasefire. The fistcuffs are over, the jingoism looks jaded, the TV crews have left. Only one important question remains: will the coastal states now rise to the occasion and show the world that ocean resources are far safer in their hands?

