

# News Round-up

## ***E-fish***

It had to happen sooner or later. You can now trade for fish on the Internet. Infomar, a project funded by DG III (Industry) of the European Commission, and a consortium headed by VEGA Group Plc, has been allocated a budget of ECU3.2 million to develop an

information and electronic trading system aimed at optimizing the marketing of fresh seafood within the EC fishing industry.

Infomar will consist of two functional modules designated FishTrade and FishCast. FishTrade will match catch availability data from vessels with buyers' requirements to establish real-time contracts as well as arranging complementary services like international shipping, insurance and quality assurance. FishCast will bring together catch data from

fishing vessels, current prices, market demand and weather conditions and predictions to forecast prices for spot markets. This service will be available by subscription.

Infomar hopes to link fish buyers, sellers and fishing vessels. As a result, all members of the fishing community will benefit not only from data as to what is currently available at the market but through the link with vessels what will be available more than a week into the future. Using this advance indication of supply and demand, buyers can plan their purchases, and suppliers can arrange to get their product to the market where its profitability is the highest. The VEGA Group claims that the result will be a higher value for the fish on the market, a more stable price for consumers, less waste, and a more efficient use of a natural resource.

## ***Stop price fixing***

Fishermen in the village of Redonda, State of Ceará, have called on all lobster fishermen in Brazil to withdraw lobster traps from the sea until SINDFRIO, the

lobster industry syndicate, stops price fixing. Fishermen from all over the State joined the strike movement, as their representatives met with the Attorney General to demand an antitrust suit.

The price for 1 kg of lobster tails opened the season at US\$24, but on 1 June, SINDFRIO reached an agreement with all exporters to cut prices by 25 per cent to US\$17.60, even as lobster prices on the international market remained unchanged and there was no variation in the exchange rate between the real and the dollar.

Half of Brazil's total lobster exports come from the small-scale sector. Artisanal fishermen, who are already burdened by heavy losses from predatory fishing and overfishing, have seen total exports drop from 2,700 tonnes in 1992 to 1,300 tonnes in 1998. They blame Brazil's government and the lobster fishing industry for the poor fisheries management. The Fishermen's Forum against Predatory Fishing has been fighting since 1993 for the implementation of the existing Lobster

Fisheries Management Plan. More details can be had from René Schärer (email: terramar@fortalnet.com.br)

## ***High-seas murder***

Authorities in China say that a Taiwanese captain who killed 11 mainland Chinese contract fishing workers in Mauritius waters last February must be severely punished, reports the Xinhua news agency. A joint investigation by mainland officials revealed that the 11 crew members of the Taiwanese fishing boat *Chin Ching* were shot dead by the captain because they refused to sign a renewal of their three-year contracts. Four other terrified crew members jumped into the sea and were drowned. A spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Co-operation said that a new model contract on providing crew for fishing boats

across the Taiwan Straits is being drafted. Meanwhile, the case is being handled by the judicial department of Mauritius, where the ship docked after the killings.

### ***At stake***

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According to D. Nandakumar of GAIA Info Systems, letters of protest have been sent to a committee of the Government of Gujarat, **India**, asking that the mangroves of the State be protected from planned developments. The Kutch coast has been targeted as an area for industrial development,

flouting the Coastal Zone Regulations (CRZ) norms. Environmentalists are concerned specifically about the coastal belt of Mundra Taluka and the adjoining area up to Kandla. While they are not averse to the development of industry, they say this should not happen in violation of conservation norms. As Kutch and Jamnagar districts have been declared the most important areas for mangroves in Gujarat, the area has been declared 'reserved' under the West Mangrove Reserve Forest. This means that the entire Kutch coastline has about 890 sq km of mangrove forests which are protected under the CRZ regulations.

Protestors have urged that immediate steps be taken to ensure that this sensitive and rich ecosystem is not destroyed because of poor planning for industrialization.

### ***More draggers?***

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High Liner Foods, a seafood company based in Halifax, **Canada**, has said that as a result of a slight recovery of cod off southern Newfoundland, it plans to buy up to five modern fish draggers or trawlers.

In response, Mark Butler, Marine Co-ordinator at the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) expressed shock and disbelief. The Federal government had just spent large sums of money trying to reduce fishing capacity, and it was inconceivable that at the slightest hint of fish, a company would try to acquire new draggers.

It is believed that fish stocks off Nova Scotia are not showing any sign of recovery and those off Newfoundland only a slight improvement.

The EAC has urged High Liner Foods to shelve its plans. It has also called on the Federal government to develop an approach to fishing capacity which embodies ecological principles and social values.

### ***Net bombs***

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Fishermen in **Italy** are afraid of netting bombs rather than fish each time they set out to sea. In the wake of the NATO attacks on Yugoslavia, seafarers have been studying charts pinpointing where NATO pilots dumped bombs on runs back from Yugoslavia. Other fishermen don't set sail at all, afraid of snagging a pilot's payload.

Most of the bombs hit designated dumping areas in the Adriatic's international waters, but some fell out of the zone, according to officials. Marine authorities brush off

fishermen's concerns that currents could move the bombs. They contend there are no strong currents in the north Adriatic. In the south, where currents do run, they say the sea bottom is so deep it is unlikely that fishing nets would scoop up missiles.

### ***Whales vs fishers***

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Whales consume approximately six times as much fish as the world's fisheries catch, claims the

Institute of Cetacean Research, Tokyo, **Japan**. As the chief predators in the food chain of the marine ecosystem, whales consume between 280 million and 500 million tonnes of fish each year, say the Institute's scientists.

This is about three to six times the amount harvested by marine fisheries. There are approximately 79 species of whales in the world. Some of them, like the minke whale, consume large quantities of commercially valuable fish species like sardine and the Pacific saury.

According to Yuichiro Harada, Staff Officer at the International Division of the Federation of Japan Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Associations, at the last meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Grenada, Japan cast doubts over the unilateral protection of cetaceans. It proposed the need for management measures designed to encompass the entire marine ecosystem, including the utilization of resources by whales.