

We Don't Need No Marinas

A project for the development of a marina in San Juanillo, in the north Pacific region of Costa Rica, has attracted strong opposition

San Juanillo, in the north Pacific region of Costa Rica, is a community of approximately 90 houses and 270 inhabitants, whose principal activity is fishing and work related to the construction and hospitality industries. There are 14 small-scale artisanal fishing boats in this coastal town, which depend on trammel nets and bottom-set lines as fishing gear, targeting mainly the spotted rose snapper (*Lutjanus guttatus*), locally known as *pargo mancha*. There are also two lobster diving vessels and a few others engaged in tourism.

The San Juanillo Fishers' Association (ASOPESJU), established in 1998, has a Board of Directors of eight members and 32 associates—nine women and 23 men. It strives to improve sanitary conditions at the fish collection centre; fetch better market prices by doing away with middlemen; and maintain access to the San Juanillo Bay.

Today, a tourism-related issue is confronting the community of San Juanillo. In July 2007, a tour operator proposed the development of a marina in the bay. The proposal was never discussed or debated publicly and only a small group of locals were in the know. Language problems confounded the issue and added to the doubts about the project.

The representatives of the investors of the marina project claimed to have had a very close relationship with the community, which contrasted with the accounts of various inhabitants we interviewed.

At one meeting we were invited to, a clear interest was expressed in developing the project as quickly as

possible. The investors had already prepared plans for a potential investment of US\$35 mn for the project, which, in addition to the marina, entailed infrastructure development in the adjoining coastal zone in the form of apartments, shops and restaurants.

However, some of the proposals put forward by the project's representatives were not well received by the community. One was for the relocation of the town's church to a more distant site so as not to interfere with the development of the marina. Verbal assurances were given to community members

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that they would be taken to the United States (US) to learn English and be trained to work for the marina project.

Workshop

In the light of these developments, the San Juanillo Fishers Association and the San Juanillo Development Association organized an information-sharing workshop to discuss the marina project. Several experts were invited, including those specializing in social, environmental and oceanographic subjects, who debated the positive and negative effects of the project, based on technical and scientific criteria and on real-life experiences. Interestingly enough, among the participants

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were those who supported the marina project, including a lawyer and local investors.

At the end of the workshop, all the members of the Board of Directors of the San Juanillo Fishers Association and the Development Association, as well as another 92 members of the community who participated in the workshop, signed a statement, addressed to several national institutions, which expressed their opposition to the project. While they were not against development per se, the community representatives questioned the manner in which the project was being developed, and the lack of transparency and clarity in matters related to the environmental, social, cultural and institutional sustainability of the project.

A new draft bill that modifies several articles of Law No. 7744, "Concession and Operation of the Tourist Marinas", states that "parts of

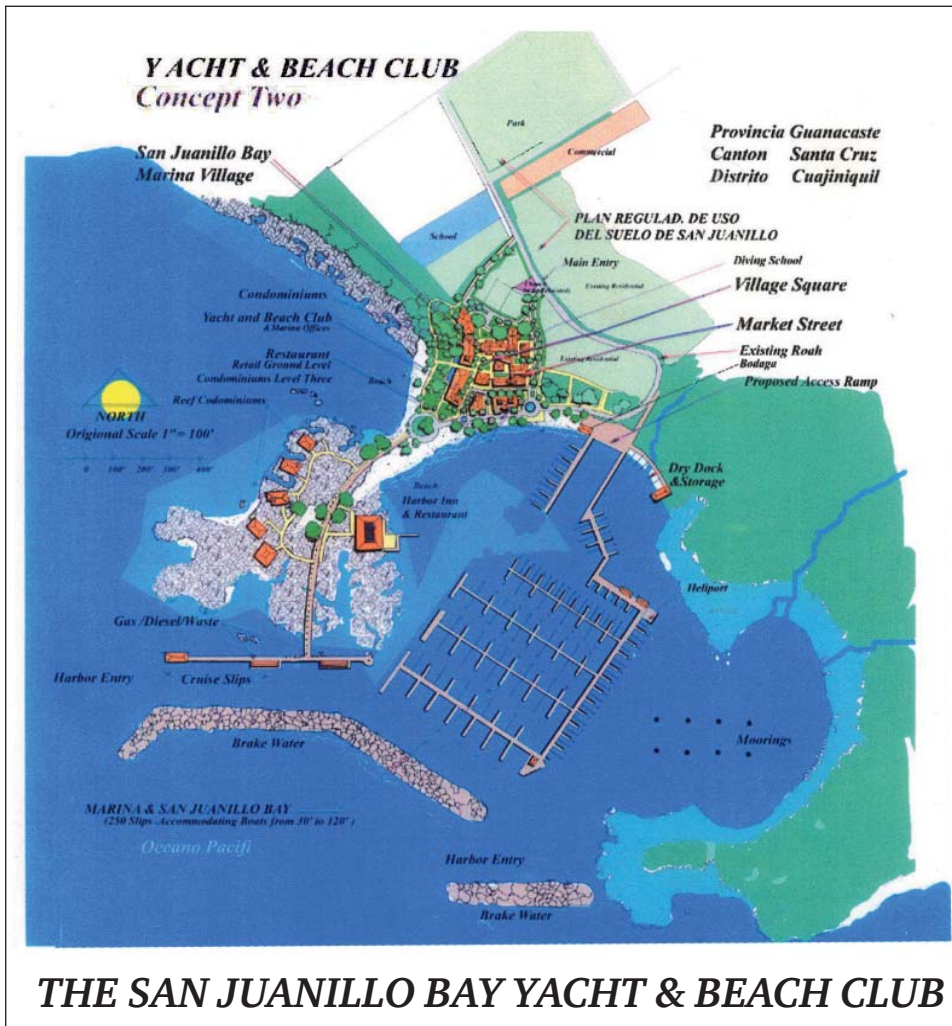
a marina are considered to include: the buildings, the installations, the access roads to different areas, and other private property designed, by their owners, to provide services for the tourist marina and included as part of the concession." This has generated doubts in the community about free access to the San Juanillo Bay, which has only one access road which could be closed off due to the marina construction. During a visit to the most important marinas of the central Pacific zone of Costa Rica, San Juanillo community members saw first-hand the harsh reality of access—most marinas had only one entrance with 24-hour security and other restrictions.

While the San Juanillo community is certainly not opposed to development as such, they want it to be responsible, be respectful of their rights, and be inclusive and transparent. In a statement to several national institutions, including the Santa Cruz Municipality, the National Institute for Fisheries and Aquaculture (INCOPECA), the Ministry of the Environment (MINAE), the Ostional National Wildlife Refuge, the Office of the Ombudsman and the National Fora of Small-scale Fishers, the community members declared:

"The undersigned persons from the communities of San Juanillo, Cuajiniquil and Guanacaste send their greetings and, at the same time, express their opposition to the intended marina development involving around 200 yachts and associated infrastructure in the fragile and enclosed bay of San Juanillo.

Collective action

Having informed ourselves about the different aspects related to the development of the marina in our community, we have collectively pondered over



the substantial negative effects of the proposal. We believe this project will jeopardize our culture as a community of artisanal fishers, and endanger the bay and its natural resources on which, for around 30 years, we have depended for our daily livelihoods. In the medium to longer term, this type of development will increase our cost of living, threaten the security and tranquillity of our community, and put at risk the tradition we wish to pass on to future generations. Through this statement, we also assert our rights to a healthy and stable environment, as established in Article 50 of the country's Constitution.

Our town has existed for more than 70 years and we know that we live in a very beautiful place with unique characteristics that attract a lot of interest. We wish to keep it as it is, and promote sustainable development projects like rural community tourism. The marina project is not consistent with the initiatives that we, as a community, have been proposing for many years. We call on the representatives of the Costa Rican State institutions primarily, the Santa Cruz Municipality, MINAE, INCOPECA and the Office of the Ombudsman—as well as national and international organizations, to support our cause and not permit the development of a marina in our bay. This project has been rejected by our community and we confirm that this is the position of not just the signatories to this petition but also organizations at the local level. We call on you to support us and follow up our campaign to deter the unwanted efforts being made by parties interested in the marina project”.

The anti-marina campaign by the San Juanillo community involved a great degree of communication and exchange of information with other coastal communities in Costa Rica, like Tarcoles on the Pacific coast, who had experienced similar development projects near their homes, which affected their traditional fishing grounds. Field visits and sharing of real-life experiences revealed the realities behind this kind of investment in 'development', which offers few



A fisherman in San Juanillo Bay getting ready to set out on a fishing trip. The San Juanillo community is fighting against the construction of a marina in the area

direct benefits for the communities in the immediate project area.

Looking ahead, the area's residents hope to bank on the natural beauty and strategic locational characteristics of San Juanillo Bay to promote projects that have no detrimental impacts and that are characterized by openness and transparency, and a commitment to the larger environmental and social well-being of the community. 3

For more



www.visitcostarica.com/ict/paginas/leyes/pdf/Law_on_Concession_and_Operation_of_Tourist_Marinas.pdf

The Marinas Concession and Operation Law

www.biocenosismarina.org/index.php/en/fisheries

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