

# A Constant Struggle

Chile's socially and politically troubled waters have provided a rich harvest of organizations in the artisanal fishery sector, as described in a recent book

The history of the social movement in Chile's artisanal fishery and its heritage are the subjects of a recently published book titled *Movimiento Social de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile; Historia y organización de la defensa del mar chileno* ('The Chilean Artisanal Fishers' Social Movement: The Story and Organization of Defending the Chilean Sea'). The book traces the development of the organizational movement from the 1950s up to 2010, highlighting its social and political importance as told through the voices of the men and women fisherworkers and supporters who were part of it.

37,768 men. The Artisanal Fishery Register also informs that there are a total of 91,632 registered fishers—21,232 fisherwomen and 70,400 fishermen—highlighting that just over 50 per cent of registered artisanal fishers belong to recognized artisanal fishing organizations. It would also seem that nowhere are fishery activities so diverse—with activities categorized as seaweed harvesting (*algueros*), diving (*buzos*)—mainly for shellfish—vessel owning (*armadores*) or fishing crews (*pescadores*).

This range of activities is reflected in the diversity of organizations that represent these varied and dynamic interests. They include those organized along trade union lines—the *sindicatos*, the associations or guilds (*gremial associations*), the co-operatives and companies (limited liability or joint stock). These, in turn, are associated into regional federations and national confederations. Today at least three organizations purport to represent Chile's highly diverse array of artisanal fishers at the national level: CONAPACH, founded in 1986 as a confederation of *sindicatos*; CONFEPACH, which divided from CONAPACH in 1998 as a confederation of federations; and the Council for the Defence of Chile's Artisanal Fishery Heritage (CONDEPP), which divided from CONAPACH in 2012 as part of a wider protest movement to oppose the privatization of fisheries access.

## Landing areas

Artisanal fishermen are also organized at the *caleta* level, the *caleta* being a recognized artisanal fishery landing area, which may include such port infrastructures as wharfs, markets,

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The book describes how the movement became formalized and structured over the last four decades, into local, regional and national-level organizations, actively engaged in fisheries management, in sitting at the negotiating table with the 'traditional enemy'—the industrial sector—and how it has been incorporated into formal policy decision-taking structures, such as the Zonal, Regional and National Fisheries Councils.

Nowhere, it would seem, are artisanal fishers more organized than in Chile. According to the Artisanal Fishery Register compiled by Chile's National Fishery Service, SERNAPESCA, as of 31 December 2014, there are 1,131 artisanal fishery organizations, with 46,521 members—8,753 women and

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ice plants, cold stores and road transport connections. There are 467 officially recognized *caletas* from the Arica and Parinacota Region in the north to the Magallanes Region in the south, including on the Oceanic Islands (Easter Island, Juan Fernandez Islands, and so on). At the local level, fishers also organize themselves into groups to engage in the AMERBs—Management Areas for Benthonic Resources. Under the AMERB scheme, selected groups of fishers are given exclusive access to manage and harvest shellfish and seaweed production in designated areas close to the coast; a kind of territorial user rights fisheries (TURF) which privileges particular groups and excludes others.

The book pays particular homage to one of the movement's charismatic leaders, Humberto Chamorro, whose vision and actions have shaped the artisanal fishing organizations that are today the dominant voices of the sector—CONAPACH and CONFEPACH. Chamorro was instrumental in the birth of both organizations, and he has presided over both. He has also been a leader in his *caleta* (Portales, next to Valparaiso in the V Region) and in the Federation of Artisanal Fishermen in the V Region (FEDEPESCA). Proceeds from sales of the book will go to fund Chamorro's medical expenses in his fight against cancer. Sadly Humberto Chamorro passed away on April 13 2015. He will be remembered as a skilled fisherman and an exceptional leader.

Whilst paying tribute to Chamorro, the book provides a unique overview of the trajectory taken by artisanal fisheries in Chile since the beginnings of the 20th century. It is a rich resource of testimonies provided by some of the key actors and provides insights into how the organs of state evolved in parallel to the movement, how the movement has converged with state and non-state actors to negotiate space and privileges, and notes the key milestones passed along the way, up to the beginning of the current decade.

Describing the origins of the artisanal fishers' movement, the

importance of leaders associated with the communist party in the 1940s and 1950s is underlined. The communist party was declared illegal in 1948 and those associated with it persecuted—often jailed and tortured. Fishermen leaders travelled the entire length of Chile's coast mobilizing fishermen to unite and organize to defend their rights as workers and citizens. Thus were established some of the first autonomous fishworkers' organizations—independent workers unions or *sindicatos*. The efforts of these early leaders gave rise to the first national-level organization in 1965, the Chilean National Federation of Artisanal Fishermen (FENAPARCH). In parallel with these autonomous initiatives efforts, the Chilean state, often with the support of the Catholic church, was also intervening to organize productive sectors, including the fisheries sector, to industrialize and form co-operatives.

Following the military coup in 1973 and the establishment of the dictatorship under General Pinochet, it became difficult and dangerous to organize along trade union lines. "People were gunned down in every *caleta*. It was a time when people feared for their lives", one leader is quoted in the book. Then, in 1979, the junta introduced new rules for setting up artisanal fishing guilds—

PERSONAL ARCHIVE OF HUMBERTO CHAMORRO Y JORGE LOBOS



President Bachelet receiving a copy of the book *Movimiento Social De Pescadores Artesanales De Chile* by Irene Escribano Veloso

known as *gremial associations*—which encouraged producers to organize along small enterprise lines, by providing training and financial support. Encouragement was also provided at gunpoint. In the words of one fisherman: “When the coup came, we found ourselves having to organize our meetings with the rifles and machine guns of the police poking our ribs.”

With the lifting of restrictions in the 1980s, and drawing inspiration from the historic 1984 Rome Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters which produced the first World Charter on Artisanal Fisheries, artisanal fishers in Chile initiated a reorganization of their sector at the national level. The 10th National Congress of Chilean Artisanal Fishers of 1986 launched the first National Artisanal Fishery Council, CONAPACH. A total of 116 delegates from 74 artisanal fishers’ organizations from the entire country participated, from Arica in the north to Chiloe in the south, uniting 43,600 fishermen from 215 *caletas*.

With the restoration of civil government in 1990, artisanal fishermen were able to organize openly, and their representatives

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became actively involved in the drafting and implementation of the 1991 Fisheries Law. The new law defined artisanal fisheries by size of vessel and occupation, and established the coastal strip out to five miles and also declared Chile’s extensive internal waters a conservation zone reserved for artisanal fishery activities. The five-mile zone has become emblematic of the struggle of Chilean artisanal fishworkers to claim their rights.

A whole chapter in the book is devoted to how in January 1996 protests led by Chamorro against the granting of licences to hake trawlers

to fish in the five-mile zone culminated with 2,500 fishworkers converging on the national Congress in Valparaiso, where they symbolically burned *Bote 626*—an artisanal fishing vessel from *caleta* Portales. The protests showed how quickly the movement could act and gather a critical mass. “This demonstration was one of the most important in the artisanal fishworkers’ struggle”, notes one commentator. But it led to deep divisions amongst the leaders and fishworkers, separating those in favour of trawling and those against.

Another chapter in the book is devoted to the emergence of CONFEPACH in the late 1990s. With the advent of democracy, political pressures increased. In 1998, the government proposed to introduce a system of individual transferable quotas (ITQs) as a way to provide stability for the industrial fishery sector. Although it was argued that the ITQs would have no impact on artisanal fishing quotas, a polemic debate ensued, giving rise to differences of opinion and stance amongst the leaders. Some leaders were against the idea of ITQs in principle; others argued that without a strong system for monitoring, control and enforcement, the system would be harmful. The founders of CONFEPACH argued that the former system of management was no longer viable, and fishermen had to move with the times or lose out.

These pressures and differences led to divisions amongst the leaders and their constituents, and a new national confederation was subsequently formed. The original national organization, CONAPACH, took up a contrary stand to the government proposals for introducing ITQs, and the new confederation, CONFEPACH, aligned itself with the government.

### **Key themes**

In the penultimate chapter of the book, entitled “Legacy and Challenges in Future Waters”, the main challenges facing the artisanal fishery are voiced. Several key themes emerge. One fundamental issue is that, in many ways, the struggles of the past bear



Fishermen from Caleta Lo Rojas marching with a banner that says "No to the Longueira Law!". Artisanal fishermen in Chile organized at the *caleta* level

little resemblance to the struggles of today. A different kind of leadership is required. The sector has become increasingly diverse and segmented, with huge inequalities emerging between different actors. The kinds of organizations required and the skills that leaders need have totally changed; organizations and leaders more able to engage in commercial activities, as well as in trade and political negotiations, are required; there is "a need to form strategic alliances with the industry and to negotiate with them. We need good teams, good professionals, and leaders with political vision...". The issue of leadership requirements today, especially the need to train young people to enter the fishery and take on leadership roles, is given great attention.

As the book closes, a new chapter is beginning in Chilean fisheries. It is a chapter which opens with Chilean fish stocks in deep crisis—50 per cent being overexploited or in a state of collapse, and with ever-increasing inequalities in the artisanal fishery sector. Thanks to the five-mile zone and the concentration of sardine and anchovy resources in these waters, a handful of owners of larger artisanal—semi-

industrial—vessels (10 per cent of the artisanal sector), a large part of whose catches end up as salmon feed, are making huge profits. The majority of artisanal fishery workers (90 per cent of the sector)—fishing crews, shellfish divers and seaweed harvesters—have no quota, and struggle to make ends meet.

Artisanal fishery workers also face the challenge of a new Fisheries and Aquaculture Law that was enacted in February 2013, and pushed through the Chilean parliament under express procedures. The law is seen in many quarters as unjust and illegitimate.

### National Confederations

In a closed-doors deal brokered by the Economy Minister, signed and sealed in 2011, the two main national confederations, CONAPACH and CONFEPACH, agreed to support the new fisheries law in exchange for receiving fish quotas valued at US\$34 mn annually from the industrial sector. The deal led to a split in CONAPACH and the founding of a new organization, the Council for the Defence of Chile's Fishing Heritage (CONDEPP), which claims to represent about one-third of Chile's artisanal fishermen.

## A Beacon Goes Out

**H**umberto Chamorro Alvarez, a historic leader of Chilean artisanal fishers, passed away on Monday 13 April 2015 after a long struggle against cancer. He is best known as one of the founders of CONAPACH, which became recognized both nationally and internationally as the voice of artisanal fishers in Chile. Born in the Valparaiso Region, he became a fisherman at an early age in the community of Portales. It was there that he showed his leadership skills in the fight to obtain better working and living conditions for Chilean artisanal fishers.

His life, times and heritage are the subject of a recent book, reviewed in this article.

The law extends the ITQ system established for the industrial sector in 2002 for a further 20 years. There are 49 national industrial fishing companies which stand to benefit from these quotas, but 75 per cent of the quotas are concentrated amongst three corporations owned by five families. Companies and politicians associated with the passage of the law through the Chilean parliament are currently subject to corruption investigations. One of the companies named in the case, Corpesca, owned by the Angelini family, holds over 50 per cent of the quota.


The Chilean Fisheries Sub Secretary, Raúl Súnico, referred to the outcome of this process as “a battle that took place two years ago, which resulted in a new fisheries law. This produced some winners, some losers and some who neither lost nor gained.” The losers are the majority of Chile’s fishery workers and indigenous people, including the most marginalized and vulnerable, who were not consulted, and who are not taken account of in the new law.

The people of Chile have also lost out, given that the industrial and, increasingly, the artisanal fishery is mainly export-oriented. Such fish as is available in Chile generally sells for a higher price than pork, chicken or beef. This is reflected in the relatively low annual per capita fish

consumption in Chile, less than seven kg—around nine per cent of the national animal protein consumption.

It is vital that the interests of Chile’s artisanal fishery workers, coastal populations and society at large are given due consideration in a national fisheries policy.

Chile has never had such a fisheries policy; rather, fisheries are governed by the Economy Ministry, and hence environmental and social issues are secondary concerns. Within the framework of such a policy, the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), could play an important role in righting the wrongs of Chile’s fisheries.

Achieving this will require strong organizations and able leaders. The lessons of history, as described in this book, show that Chile’s artisanal fishing community has considerable capacity to produce both. The struggle continues. 

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