

# Against the Current

The range of diversity of geography, gear and techniques of fishing in Peru forces the country's small-sale fishers to grapple with difficult working conditions

The small-scale fisheries sector in Peru is extraordinarily diverse, particularly in terms of the gear used to gather or catch resources, which comprise a wide range of nets, lines, traps and harpoons. There is also diversity in the vessels used for fishing. They are usually under 15 m in length, and have a hold capacity below 32.6 cu m, and, in most cases, use manually lifted gear. There are also those who fish without boats.

Geographical diversity exists too, as fishing takes place on the shore or in coastal and open waters. The different regions of the country—the north, the south and the central parts—have their own specificities. The duration of fishing operations varies too: some last a few hours, others up to three weeks.

The markets range from the country's smallest villages to its largest cities (including Lima, the capital, home to almost 30 per cent of the Peruvian population) as well as international destinations across the world.

If anchovy (anchoveta) has been historically Peru's flagship species, mahi-mahi and giant squid have considerably grown and become, in recent years, the largest artisanal fisheries in the world for these species.

While the last decades have seen an increase of exports from small-scale fisheries—destined for markets in Asia, Europe and North America—domestic markets have also grown greatly (with a demand so high it has also boosted imports, in a country generally considered a major fishing power), both at household and food-industry levels (which, in particular, has expanded greatly).

A census of the small-scale marine fleet, carried out in 2012, provides data on the number of fishworkers and fishing vessels, as well as additional information about the sector.

There are over 44,000 fishworkers, with 3.1 per cent being women (mainly in the southern regions, where they engage in seaweed collection). According to the census, 44.4 per cent of the fishermen live in the northern regions of Peru (Tumbes, Piura, Lambayeque), 39.5 per cent in the centre (La Libertad, Ancash, Lima, Ica), and 16.2 per cent in the south (Arequipa, Moquegua, Tacna), of the country.

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In 2012, 49.8 per cent were aged 30 to 50 years. A further 28.2 per cent were under 30 and 22 per cent over 50 years of age.

Two major school education levels exist in Peru—the primary and the secondary. For the purposes of the census, fishermen having attended at least one year in the upper level were classified under the secondary education level. Fifty-eight per cent followed at least a year of secondary education, 31.4 per cent attended only primary education and 9.1 per cent took further education.

Younger fishermen attended more years of school than their older colleagues: 65.5 per cent under 30 years attained secondary levels (with 24.1 per cent having completed

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only primary school), while among the over-50s, 40.9 per cent said they attended secondary education, while 51.7 per cent attended only primary school.

Finally, of the total of over 44,000 fisher men and women, 5 per cent reported having had an accident, and 12 per cent, an illness in the last 12 months.

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With regard to the fleet, the census registered 16,045 boats, although a small number (several dozens) are registered for transport in coastal areas and a similarly small number are not operational. Vessels are classified in three groups according to length: between 15 and 11 m (the largest sub-group), 11 to 7 m, and finally, below 5 m.

The first group (larger vessels) includes a significant number of seiners, a fleet segment that has increased in the last decade due to easy access to anchovy resources for human consumption. More recently, the fleet targeting giant squid and mahi-mahi has also expanded greatly. This group represents 13 per cent of the total fleet.

The second group includes vessels targeting giant squid and mahi-mahi, as well as seiners and other types of vessel targeting pelagic (tuna, mackerel, horse mackerel) and demersal species (mullet, lorna drum, hake). They represent 54 per cent of the fleet.

Vessels with a length below 7 m include mainly coastal craft that use hooks-and-line or gillnets, targeting a wide variety of inshore species, as well as supporting boats supplying compressed air to divers gathering shellfish (scallop, clam, mussel and sea snail). They represent 29 per cent of the registered small-scale fleet.

The census further indicates that 59 per cent of the fleet lacked

valid fishing licences. This partially explains how the fisheries operate, to a great extent, in an informal context—with implications for working and safety conditions aboard fishing vessels.

### **ILO: Conditions of work in the fishing sector**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted the Work in Fishing Convention (Convention 188) in 2007, establishing decent conditions of work on board fishing vessels, according to boat size and other parameters. It came into force by end 2016, but Peru has not yet ratified it. We will try to analyze how the small-scale fishing sector in Peru stands with regard to different aspects of the Convention.

### **Working age**

Although Peru has recently passed legislation regulating working age in the fishing sector, tradition determines that children learn the trade at an early age, normally by helping their fathers (in most cases) or other relatives (less frequently). Many fishermen, having been raised in coastal areas (though there are numerous migrant workers in the activity), defend this practice as they recall how they learned to fish and who taught them. While it is true that the fisheries raise higher expectations now than in the past, the activity remains firmly anchored in the transmission of knowledge and the building of identity. Children below working age may be found in the fishing sector, but they normally carry out ancillary tasks, such as catch landing.

### **Onboard working conditions**

Onboard working conditions depend on the size of the vessel and the duration of the fishing operations. By their very nature, they are conducted at different times of the day, and they last as long as the skipper deems fit.

The number of crew members is determined by the type of gear used. Catches are not normally processed on board Peruvian fishing vessels, including the small-scale sector,

with the exception of some specific fisheries where some basic processing takes place; therefore, working hours are not exceedingly extended in order to add value to the catch.

Working conditions related to safety, rest and health are poor due to the lack of adequate space and equipment. Crew members answer nature's call by leaning overboard, generally grabbing a rope to avoid falling to the sea.

### Risks in marine fisheries

While fishing is generally acknowledged as an intrinsically risky activity, some fishing operations are particularly dangerous. The higher risk exposure in Peru concerns divers, who collect shellfish underwater, breathing compressed air supplied from a vessel through a pipe that divers secure with their teeth. Although accidents are relatively frequent, neither do they gain national media attention nor are they captured in a centralized register. There is a lack of information about possible harmful effects of non-fatal decompression accidents.

On the other hand, the good (or bad) functioning of the engine or other power-supply mechanisms may compound the effect of other risk factors. Mechanical failure is the most common cause for a fishing vessel's loss of course or communication. Strong waves or winds, and/or overload or specific individual incidents may also increase the risks aboard a fishing boat.

### Access to health services

Small-scale fishermen and women may be affiliated to the country's social-security regime for salaried workers, where contributions are made by both the employee and the employer. In the case of small-scale fishworkers, contributions do not confer a right to a retirement pension, but provide healthcare, with the minimum contribution being around US\$23.6. For a further US\$1.60 per month, fishworkers may subscribe to a life-insurance regime supported by the national social-security system. Fishworkers are required to

register, and payments are collected monthly through small-scale fisheries organizations. A series of mechanisms was put in place that disappeared with regionalization.

Nevertheless, the legislation regulating these matters excludes self-employed small-scale fishermen from the coverage of risky activities, even though fishing is a dangerous profession. This type of insurance can be secured for a monthly fee of US\$9.8.

The situation has created a sort of grey area, as it contradicts the general principle that fishing is a dangerous activity per se and should be covered by adequate high-risk insurance (established over two years ago), and it seriously reduces its reach, already restricted by the informal character of fishing operations and by the attitude of regional governments towards artisanal fisheries.

According to social-security statistics, in March 2017 there were 2,645 registered artisanal fishermen and women, accounting for 6 per cent of the total registered fishworkers in 2012. It is worth mentioning that the number has increased to 23 per cent since then.

By end July 2017, the National Parliament passed legislation providing accident insurance in fisheries, inspired by existing car-insurance legislation. Shipowners are

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Gillnet craft at Chimbote bay, Peru. The markets range from the country's smallest villages to its largest cities as well as international destinations across the world

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Fishermen day celebration, Cabo Blanco, Peru. Small-scale fisheries in Peru is extraordinarily diverse, particularly in terms of the gear used to gather or catch resources

bigger and more vulnerable), it was short-lived, (compared to the long and heavy rains of the 1998 El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) episode, which had a bigger impact on infrastructure and on fishing work conditions, in terms of suspension of fishing activities and destruction of public and private facilities on the shore. A depletion of traditional fishery resources was not felt, although other species, such as prawns and tuna, increased their presence in the 2016 ENSO.

However, the negative impact of El Niño should not be underestimated, as it resulted in more than 160 fatalities and several hundred million dollars in material losses. In the north of the country, the gross domestic product (GDP) fell to an extent that can only be compared to a similar contraction derived from the 1983 El Niño. Furthermore, it brought about a breakout of dengue, a disease that was unheard of in this territory, even in the urban coastal environment, and not only in fishing areas. 3

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required to take out private health insurance in the case of accidents at work (from pre-harvest tasks to catch landings). They are also required to pay for this type of coverage but they can also transfer the cost to crew members, deducing such expenditure from their salaries. This requirement is applied both to individuals and companies, as long as they are formally recognized shipowners.

Fisheries are conducted in an informal labour context, with frequent illegal practices that must be curtailed, as it is precisely in this type of operations that decent-work conditions and safety standards are not respected.

### The impact of El Niño events

Recent years have seen the emergence of two important modalities of the El Niño effect. The first starts in the central region of the Pacific Ocean and, after several weeks, reaches the American coast. Sometimes it hits Peru in full; at other times, such as in 2016, it brings less severe conditions in its Eastern rim, just south from the Equator, next to and within, Peru's territorial waters.

In the summer of 2017, a different event took place, which was mainly felt in Peru, although with a shorter development. Although it greatly damaged the coastal cities in the north (which, these days, are

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<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/detail/EN/3847.html?detpag=mapart>

#### Diversiónary Tactics

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/03/06/peru-anchoveta-pescadores>

#### In Peru, Fishing Less Anchoveta Pays Off

[http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0308597X13002194/1-s2.0-S0308597X13002194-main.pdf?\\_tid=7671bad4-964a-11e7-bacd-0000aacb35d&acdnat=1505063401\\_84917f4a0f695b6aba21bf7044eb0b30](http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0308597X13002194/1-s2.0-S0308597X13002194-main.pdf?_tid=7671bad4-964a-11e7-bacd-0000aacb35d&acdnat=1505063401_84917f4a0f695b6aba21bf7044eb0b30)

#### Valuing Seafood: The Peruvian Fisheries Sector

<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/detail/EN/918.html?detpag=mapart>

#### On The Verge Of Collapse