

Working for Fishers

The Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) aims to protect and promote decent work and living conditions on board fishing vessels

The Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) enters into force on 17 November 2017 for those 10 countries that have ratified the Convention (see article on page 4). On the same day, the European Council (EC) Directive 2017/159 on implementing C188 will also enter into force. It requires all EU Member States to adopt measures to comply with the Directive by 2019.

The Convention is meant to protect and promote decent work and living conditions on board fishing vessels, large and small, including their right to organize; their right of freedom of association; their right to freedom from forced labour and child labour; their rights against all forms of discrimination; and their rights to occupational safety and health and social security. It applies mainly to fishers on board marine fishing vessels. It can, potentially, eliminate exploitative labour conditions for fishers, both migrant and resident fishers. The EC Directive, aptly, calls C188 “a single coherent instrument to complete the international standards for living and working conditions” in the fishing sector.

C188 enters into force at a time when marine-capture fisheries have already been transformed from development-driven, to conservation and management-driven fisheries. Several of the international environmental certification schemes for accessing international markets for fish and fish products now require meeting social standards, in addition to environmental standards. These social standards include labour standards.

The linkage of social and environmental aspects of fishing, in particular, is not lost on ILO when at the June 2017 Ocean Conference on the Sustainable Development Goal 14, dealing with conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, ILO made a voluntary commitment to improve the conditions of migrant fishers and to support States in undertaking comparative analyses of C188 and their national laws.



We hope the number of countries ratifying C188 would eventually increase to include all major fish-producing nations of the world and that it benefits fishers on board both larger and smaller vessels. A large number

of smaller vessels are expanding their range of fishing operation and occupying niches vacated by larger fishing vessels. A large number of smaller fishing vessels are undertaking longer fishing trips in Africa, Asia and Latin America (see article on Peru, page 9), lasting several weeks. Implementation of C188 can protect fishers on board these vessels as well. The Convention would become the first legally binding instrument that protects the human rights of fishers on board small-scale fishing vessels.

We believe C188, in a matter of a decade from entering into force, will irreversibly improve the working and living environment on board fishing vessels worldwide, that it will put an end to forced labour in fishing, that it will fully protect children from hazardous work in fishing, and that it will help provide social-security protection to all fishers.