

News Round-up

Top of the class

Marching to the top of the class of global seafood exporters is **Thailand**. With total sales last year of 86bn baht (US\$3.44bn), it displaced the US as the world's top seafood exporter. US seafood exports dropped from \$3.45bn in 1992 to \$3.07bn last year. On the other hand, predicts INFOFISH, in the next three years, Thai

seafood exports will touch \$4bn. Today, Thai shrimps have carved out a 40 percent share in the international market. But pollution has taken a heavy toll on the black tiger shrimp farms on the eastern seaboard of Thailand. Too much feed, medicine and chemicals have polluted the ponds and led to mass deaths of shrimps. The destruction of vast areas of mangroves has left the area with precious little ideal grounds for shrimp cultivation.

How passive is passive?

Precious passive gear like gill-nets, trammel nets, hoop nets and fixed hooks are often regarded less damaging, right? Not necessarily so, says the European Commission. In a recent communication, it points

out that such gear may aggravate the already heavy exploitation of fish stocks like cod, hake and haddock.

Within the **European Union** (EU), different regions use these devices differently. For example, Denmark uses more of fixed-mesh gear to catch cod and turbot, not so Scotland. Spain catches more of hake with fixed gear than Portugal. But almost all the shellfish in the EU are caught with fixed gear.

True, fixed gear can offer selectivity in catch, but the Commission feels that new guidelines should be issued for the regulation of fixed fishing gear too.

Keep off!

Another sort of regulation is taking place far away. Japanese authorities in the island of **Hokkaido** have asked local fishing co-operatives not to violate the border of the Russian zone off the Kurile islands.

The recent past has seen a number of incidents

involving local crab fishermen and Russian border guards. These Japanese fishermen have now been told to stick to the fishing areas assigned

to them and not to stray into the Russian zone.

Dirty waters

Straying into the waters around **Barbados** are nitrates from fertilizers and sewage, which run off the island into its coastal water. Heavy nitrate pollution of the marine environment is believed to be the cause of the deaths of thousands of reef fish around Barbados. Analyses by laboratories

in Barbados, Canada and Puerto Rico have confirmed that the deaths are due to disease caused by bacteria, most probably *Flexibacter maritimus*, which thrives on nitrates.

Crackdown

Unlikely to thrive are the many illegal floating hostels run by hostels run by Taiwanese people who offer accommodation for mainland Chinese fishermen waiting for jobs from Taiwan fishing companies.

The Mainland Affairs Council has begun to crack down on such activities. Taiwanese shipowners have been ordered to send back Chinese mainlanders. Around, 1,000 have been camping in the dozen or so 'floating hostels'

anchored off southern and north-eastern Taiwan.

Taiwan fishing companies prefer mainland Chinese as crew, since they share the language and cultural habits. But such hiring is regarded illegal, since Taiwan does not permit the mainlanders to work for Taiwan companies. The crackdown was also prompted by the death of 14 of these mainland fishermen, drowned when Typhoon Tim attacked Taiwan in July.

Russian Passion

Certainly not under attack is **Russia-United States**(US) co-operation in the field of fisheries. Recently the Russian Federal Committee for Fisheries sent a delegation to the US to meet officials of the State Department, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Department for Fish and Wildlife.

The Russians hope to familiarize themselves with the structure of American fisheries. The Americans will probably help in building a fish processing and refrigerating facility in Vladivostok.

Angling for foreign seas

Building up links with the EU in **Angola** whose two-year fisheries agreement with the EU is now in force. In exchange for fishing rights off the Angolan coast, the EU will give ECU13.9m as financial compensation. It will also give an extra ECU2.8m for various scientific and technical programmes in Angola. The agreement lapses in May 1996. Until then, a fixed number of

EU shrimp vessels, demersal trawlers and bottom-set longliners, freezer tuna seiner vessels and surface longliners can operate in Angola's waters.

Enough, no more

No such easy passage is likely in **Morocco** whose prime minister has called on the EU to revise its four-year fishing accord with his country. The accord, signed in May 1992, fetches Morocco US\$

130m a year. But Morocco is now worried that fishing by boats based in southern Spain, the Canary Islands and Portugal is likely to dwindle its resources, among the world's richest for sardines, tuna and squid.

Sign on...

On the other hand, **Argentina** has become the first Latin American country to sign a bilateral fisheries agreement with the EU.

The agreement, signed in May and valid for five years, has the usual provisions for catch and financial compensation. It also lets EU fishing vessels operate through temporary associations with Argentine companies.

Around 70 EU trawlers will be able to fish in Argentine waters for an annual total catch of 250,000 tonnes. These include 120,000 tonnes of Argentine hake.

Of the remainder, Patagonian grenadiers, and Argentine cod and squid will be the main species.

The EU will spend around ECU162.5m to help set up the five-year agreement.

...but we sign off

Starting this year, **Vietnam** has suspended all categories of fishing concessions for Tai trawlers. While ordering a review of its fishery sector, it gave a month's reprieve for three existing Thai joint ventures authorized under the foreign investment law.

Meanwhile, a joint ministerial-level task force has been set up to resolve the problem of fishing rights in the Gulf of Thailand. The fisheries question is proving to be a major thorn in bilateral relations between the two countries.

Trouble broiling

Thorny problems also await those in **Chile** who hoped to rake in millions from the 'broiler chicken of the sea' a cheap and tasty farmed salmon. They may no longer be able to grin their way to the bank.

Though the quarter-billion-dollar industry is said to be an overnight success story, less than ten years old, unchecked growth and pollution could well create a unchecked growth and pollution could well create a back-lash, say local residents and environmentalists.

Lakes in even remote areas have been converted into salmon farms. The result: waters are polluted by uneaten fish feed, waste and

chemicals. Lack of supervisory infrastructure allows these farms to get away with violations of environmental laws.

Model ocean

At the Universite de Moncton in New Brunswick, **Canada**, the Chair in Sustainable Development has proposed a model ocean concept to solve the crisis in the Atlantic groundfish fisheries.

The concept is based on the principles of sustainable development and an integrated management of resources. It is proposed to test the concept in a specific marine region of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence known as the Shediac Valley, located east of New Brunswick and north of Prince Edward Island.

Zones of protection

Benefits are also likely in the **United States**, where the Clinton administration has proposed new restrictions on logging, grazing and related activities along the 16,800 miles of streams in the Pacific North-west to help save troubled fish species. These will be managed by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

The 50 to 300-foot wide riparian buffer strips are similar to those planned for national forests containing northern spotted owls.

This move comes in the wake of reports that nearly half of the 400 species of anadromous fish like salmon and trout are showing significant drops in numbers.

Already, 106 are extinct. One cause is logging and grazing along stream banks, which speed up erosion. This fills the streams with silt and also destroys the shade needed to keep the water cool enough for some species of fish.

The north-west regional director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations says this is the first time that good fisheries science has prevailed over the timber harvest programme.

Zones of assault

If only equally good sense prevailed over the powers that be in **India**, screamed the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF). It recently organized a two-day fisheries strike to protest against the Indian government's new-found passion for joint ventures in its EEZ.

It is doubtful whether the deep seas have the resource potential to sustain the several licences the government has lately granted. Also to be affected are the catches of the artisanal sector in India which has around 1.5 million active, sea-going fishermen.

The NFF campaign, spread over a couple of months, built up public awareness on the dangers of over-fishing. It also received widespread and sympathetic media coverage in India.