

Talking the fishing

Cosme Caracciolo, President of the National Confederation of Chilean Artisanal Fishermen, criticizes the EU-Chile fisheries agreement

Recently, the Brussels Office of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA) hosted a visiting delegation from Chile.

The two delegates were Juan Carlos Cardenas, Director of Centro Ecoceanos (and a member of the coastal network 'Parlamento del Mar') and Cosme Caracciolo, the President of the National Confederation of Chilean Artisanal Fishermen (CONAPACH).

Cardenas and Caracciolo had been invited to Rome to participate in the NGO Forum for Food Sovereignty, an event organized by civil society organizations in parallel with the 'World Food Summit: Five Years Later' conference held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). As they were in Europe, they took the opportunity to visit Brussels, the institutional headquarters of the European Union (EU).

The recent signing of an 'Association Agreement' between the EU and Chile, and concerns that the fisheries aspects of the agreement would prejudice the rights and situation of the artisanal fishing communities was the reason for their visit to Brussels.

The signing of the agreement comes at a time when the Chilean government, despite considerable opposition, is trying to push through a new fisheries bill that will privatize access rights to fisheries resources.

In this interview, Cosme Caracciolo provides some insights into the reasons why the 40,000 fishermen and seaweed

harvesters, together with their families and coastal communities, are concerned about the agreement with the EU.

Q: After spending a week here in Brussels meeting with Commission officials and parliamentarians, how do you now feel about the agreement with the EU?

A: When I visited the European Parliament, I was amazed to learn that the elected representatives of the European people were as ignorant as the Chilean Parliament about the content of the agreement. Despite its wide-ranging implications, the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament had not received the full text, let alone been briefed about the agreement. I thought that such things only happened in Chile!

I was also impressed by the lack of transparency, and by how much misinformation there is about the agreement. For example, I was very surprised to hear the response of Spanish Fisheries Minister to the parliamentary questions on the agreement. He claimed that the agreement does not grant access, but only facilitates exports. He then went on to say that the closure of Chilean ports to EU vessels fishing in international waters meant that repairs could not be carried out, refuelling could not take place, and that sick fishermen could not be disembarked. The ports' closure only applies to the landing of fish catches. His claims about sick fishermen, refuelling and repairs are completely untrue.

I was also very interested to learn that a Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) will be carried out on the agreement, but so far, the fishing communities of Chile

have not been consulted. There also needs to be a much greater emphasis on the shared responsibilities of the EU and Chile on issues like resource conservation, respect for food security and the livelihood rights of the coastal communities, and, most importantly, promoting sustainable development of the fishery for the benefit of the Chilean people. So far, dialogue on such issues seems to have been lacking.

We are also very interested to learn that the agreement contains provisions for co-operation. We would like to know how the artisanal sector can benefit from these provisions. I feel that we have made some important contacts here in Europe, and I am looking forward to meeting European parliamentarians when they visit Chile next year to provide them with direct experience of our sector. But I also feel that there is much to do to raise awareness about this agreement at the grass-roots level, and to mobilize opposition against its negative aspects.

Q: How will the agreement affect you and your members?

A: There are three main aspects that concern us. First and foremost is the timing of the agreement, which coincides with the latest attempt by our government to introduce individual transferable quotas (ITQs). This new bill, if passed, will effectively exclude the

artisanal fishing sector from the system. In the first place, the allocation mechanism is highly unjust; secondly, it will put into the hands of a few industrial companies resources that are the patrimony of the Chilean people; thirdly, the artisanal fishworkers lack the necessary capital to compete in the quota market; and fourthly, it will open up Chilean fishery resources to international investment. The impact of this will be to transform artisanal fishermen and their families into a cheap source of labour for the fishing and aquaculture industries.

What you also have to remember is that artisanal fisheries in Chile provide some 60,000 jobs directly in fishing, shell-fish collecting, seaweed harvesting and associated activities. The fish produced by the artisanal sector is for direct human consumption. It provides 90 per cent of the fish consumed by Chileans, 12.4 per cent of their animal protein intake, and, in addition, 25 per cent of the export earnings from fishery products.

Q: But won't the ITQ system only apply to a few species of interest to the industrial fishery?

A: The ITQ system will be applied to the resources classified as fully exploited. These are resources that are fished by both the artisanal and industrial sectors. They include two species of key importance to the artisanal fishery: the horse mackerel

(*jurel*) and hake (*merluza*). In both cases, due to the informal nature of the sector, the landings have not been fully recorded, and this puts us at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to quota allocation. In the case of the hake fishery, there are many *caletas* (fishing centres) that are totally dependent on this one fishery at all levels, from catching to processing, marketing and distribution. Depriving them of access rights by placing severe quota restrictions threatens the very survival of such communities. That is why the fishing communities are on the streets in protest against this system. It is unjust, and it will deprive them of their rights to food and livelihood.

Q: What about the 5-mile reserved zone? Doesn't that provide you with some security?

A: The 5-mile reserved area is very important as a conservation area for fish species that breed close to the coast, and that spend the early parts of their lives there. We have, therefore, campaigned hard to prevent the use of destructive fishing practices, such as trawling and purse-seining, in the five-mile reserved area.

However, there seems to be a misconception in Europe about artisanal fisheries in Chile, where the sector is well-developed, highly diversified and heterogeneous. In fact, only about 20 per cent of the artisanal fishing operations are carried out within the zone.

With vessels of up to 18 m, with the capacity of spending several days at sea, many of the artisanal fishing operations occur outside the 200-mile exclusive economic zone. At the same time, in many areas, you will find small communities living at a subsistence level, gleaning what they can from the sea within a few miles of the coast.

The lack of regulation in the fishery is also of great concern to us. In fact, the main regulations governing the artisanal sector are self-imposed. We have banned trawling as an artisanal gear, to aid the recovery of species. Purse-seining is also banned for similar reasons. In the case of the drift-net fishery for swordfish, we restrict the net length to 1,000 fathoms

(about 50 m). In the long-line fisheries, we also have restrictions on the number of hooks.

Q: I understand that your family has a long history of fishing.

A: My grandfather, my father and uncles were all fishermen, and I too worked in this fishery from an early age. Sadly, this once-rich fishery is now in decline. Despite this, I have learned that the EU wants to undertake research to clarify whether or not the resource is overexploited! In Chile, we have knowledge and experience learned over several generations. If you want information, come to us! Also, the artisanal sector is quite capable of supplying the EU market with prime fish. Tell us what you want, and we will supply it!

This interview with Cosme Caracciolo, President of CONAPACH, was conducted by Brian O'Riordan (briano@skypro.be) of ICSF's Brussels office