

News Round-up

Jailbirds freed

The Government of **Indonesia** has announced the repatriation of 34 Filipinos, 29 of them fishermen from Southern Mindanao, who were earlier arrested and jailed for illegal fishing.

The repatriation came after a series of bilateral negotiations following the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Philippine and Indonesian governments in Davao City recently.

Local fishing groups, led by the Socksargen Federation of Fishing Associations and Allied Industries, started negotiations with Indonesian

trade officials last month to include a provision on handline fishermen in the bilateral fishing agreement forged by the Indonesian and Philippine governments.

The agreement covers the fishing grounds between Southern Mindanao and North Sulawesi. Filipino fishers have hailed the Indonesian government's fast repatriation of the jailed Mindanao fishermen, stressing that this move confirms the close fraternal relations being fostered between the two countries, which are the prime movers behind the reactivation of the East Asian Growth Area.

Shark ban

The **Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA)** has announced the closure of an area of the South Australian coastline to shark fishing, as it seeks a more effective method of protecting school sharks. AFMA is currently consulting with South Australian fishers holding Commonwealth shark fishing permits. The closure had been originally suggested by the commercial fishing industry.

Research shows that pregnant school sharks gather in the shallow waters of the Head of the Bight

before they migrate to give birth in specific areas off the Tasmanian coast.

Levels of school sharks can take many years to recover from overfishing because they are a relatively slow breeding species, which is why it is so important to protect the pregnant females. Closure of

the area where they aggregate off the South Australian coast (between Eyre Bluff and the Western Australian border) is expected to help promote recovery of the stock.

Out of USA?

As a result of strict **United States** aquaculture laws, the Norwegian salmon producing company, Fjord Seafood ASA, one of the largest in the world, has announced that it will be closing its farming centres in Maine after next year's farmed salmon harvest. Seven per cent of Fjord Seafood's production occurs in the US, where the

company holds 15 licences allowing it to harvest 6,000 tonnes of salmon per year.

In Chile, however, Norwegian salmon companies have been extremely successful. As a result, Fjord Seafood has announced a 15 to 20 per cent increase in production for 2004 in Chile, where production and returns have been improving every quarter. The company has now been able to obtain new sales contracts guaranteeing higher prices for the next six months. Subsequent to the initial announcement, however, a Fjord Seafood spokesman denied that the company was pulling out of the US.

Closed sea

Fishers have been ordered to cease from fishing sardines, herrings and mackerels off the waters of Northern Iloilo in the Visayan sea of the **Philippines**. The closed season will be from 15 November to 15 March next year, which is the breeding season for these species. Violators shall pay a fine of 500 to 5,000 pesos or imprisonment from six months to four years, or both.

According to data from the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, the western

Visaya's fisheries production from 1998 to 2002 grew by 45,070 tonnes. Last year's production was 353,916 tonnes.

Of the volume, municipal fisheries account for the bulk of production, with 131,44 tonnes, followed by aquaculture, with 104,678 tonnes, and commercial fisheries, with 117,797 tonnes.

The Visayan Sea, however, is now faced with problems of resource depletion, habitat degradation, unsustainable resource-use patterns and resource-use conflicts.

Sabah calling

Dalian Glory Technology Development Co Ltd of **China** is planning to invest in deep-sea fishing and aquaculture on the east coast of Sabah on the northern tip of the island of Borneo.

The company will bring in 60 trawlers from China for the deep-sea fishing project in Semporna, while the aquaculture project will be set up at Kuala Merotai in Tawau.

The two projects—estimated to be worth around 180 mn Malaysian ringgit altogether—will be undertaken as a joint venture with the Kuala Lumpur-based

company, M-Square Sdn Bhd.

Taxed dry

A new tax on the import of dry fish, designed to boost the local fishing industry, has caused a public outcry in **Sri Lanka**. Dry fish, known as *karawala*, is a staple diet of the Sri Lankan working class.

The majority of the fish is imported from the Maldives, Pakistan, India and the Middle East, but now the government has ordered that foreign exporters of dry fish to Sri Lanka must pay a 10 per cent duty, a 20 per cent surcharge, 10 per cent VAT as well as a 1 per cent Ports Authority levy. Previously, foreign exporters paid only a 6.5 per cent defence levy and a 10 per cent stamp duty.

Critical study

A new report from Stanford University researchers has criticized the **United States'** fisheries management councils as ineffective for overseeing the country's vast seafood resources. The report, *Taking Stock of the Regional Fisheries Management*

Councils, is the latest in a series of reports on US ocean health funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. Eight management councils—the Western Pacific, North Pacific, Pacific, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic and New England—were created by the US Congress in 1976 under the Magnuson-Stevens Act to oversee fisheries along the US coastline.

The study surveyed members of what it deemed the four most important fishing regions (with around a 50 per cent response rate), conducted research on the council system and measured the councils against standards for 'good governance' under Congressional statutes regulating State agencies.

The report concluded that the councils are unlikely to solve fisheries problems facing the US because

of conflicts in their core mission (limiting the number of fish caught and allocating allowable catch among the industry), the "highly

homogeneous" makeup of the councils, and potential personal conflicts of interest among council members.

Child labour

Under the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) of the International Labour Organization (ILO), **Indonesia** has committed itself to eliminating child labour on "jermal" fishing platforms by 2004. ILO-IPEC estimates that in 2000-2003, a total of 1,000 boys in Medan, North Sumatra were at risk of life-threatening accidents and

drowning while working 12-20 hours per day 15-25 km out at sea. The young boys suffer three months of isolation and are also vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Indonesia, among the first countries in Southeast Asia to launch the child labour programme, has ratified ILO Conventions No. 138 on minimum age and No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour.