

News Round-up

Stock meet

The Second Informal Meeting of the States Parties to the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks will be held from 23 to 25 July 2003 at United Nations Headquarters in **New York**.

The meeting is expected to review the implementation of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, including the establishment of the Assistance Fund to assist developing States Parties.

Licensed to fish

Three East African countries—**Kenya**, **Uganda** and **Tanzania**—have started issuing licences in Lake Victoria to end the

current crossborder fishing conflicts.

According to Caroline Mukasa, a senior economist with the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO), districts along the borders have been mandated to issue the fishing licences.

A report presented to the East African Legislative Assembly by Osienalla, a Kenyan-based NGO, shows that about 115 Kenyans have to date been arrested for illegal fishing in neighbouring countries.

The World Conservation (IUCN) says the conflicts have been sparked by competition for the Nile Perch, which is in high demand.

Meanwhile, the LVFO has helped Kenyan fishermen living around Lake Victoria to patent their commercial lifeline, the Nile Perch.

Subsidy proposed

A local delegation in **Chile** belonging to the “Friends of Fish” group has presented a new proposal on possible approaches to improved disciplines on fisheries subsidies to the Negotiating

Group on Rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Members of the “Friends of Fish” group include the US, Argentina, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Peru, as well as Chile.

After considering previous submissions of the US and the EU,

the Chilean paper proposes a “red box” of banned fisheries subsidies, and an “amber box” of conditional subsidies.

All subsidies that promote overcapacity and overfishing would be included in the “red box”.

The “amber box” would include all other subsidies that do not cause injury to other Members, and would only occur after other Members receive notification.

EU in Mauritania

The president of Mauritania has ratified a fisheries access agreement with Spain. The agreement signed

with the European Union gives Spanish French, Portuguese, Italian, and British vessels access to fish tuna in Mauritanian waters.

The agreement, promoted by the Spanish government, allows 39 vessels belonging to the national fleet to operate in Mauritanian fishing grounds and will remain in force until 2 December 2003.

Under the terms of the agreement, the EU will help to set up scientific and technical aspects of the fisheries, including surveillance, to be funded out of the EU 420,000 annual budget supplied by the EU.

Trawl ban

The environmental agency of **Brazil**, Ibama, has banned coastal trawling in the northeastern States of Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte and Pernambuco.

The regulations aim to reduce catches of undersized fish through indiscriminate use of trawl nets.

They should also help to protect manatees that inhabit the northeast coast and to reduce the incidence of disputes between fishermen using manual trawls and those using motorized trawl gear.

Fines of BRL70,000-100,000 (US\$24,750-35,350) will be imposed for any breach in regulations, depending on the severity of the offence.

Fishy warning

Local fish stocks contaminated with toxins and a perilous drop in shellfish catches are signalling to millions of Japanese that their favourite food is in danger. The per capita consumption of seafood in Japan is around 70 kg, among the highest in the world.

Fears of mercury poisoning have led to warnings about consuming popular species, including the bright-red sea bream called *kinmedai* (alfonsin) and swordfish, both of which are expensive delicacies.

The other species that are the subjects of the warning include cheaper tuna and shark, and sperm whale.

The official warning is that the mercury content in the fish, at 0.44 parts per million (ppm), can harm foetuses.

Mercury poisoning, in the form of methylmercury, affects the nervous system and the symptoms and condition are similar to those found in Minamata, Japan's

worst case of industrial pollution.

Can that duty

The canning industry in **Spain** is up in arms over the EU cuts in import duty on canned tuna from Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia.

Backed by their

French, Portuguese and Italian counterparts, representatives are calling on the European Parliament for support to protect the industry from measures that offer advantages to third-country imports.

The European Council's decision allows 25,000 tonnes of cans from Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia to enter the EU with a 12 per cent tariff, from 1 July onwards. The previous tariff rate was 24 per cent. The Council's ruling also allows a 12 per cent increase in the amount of imports in 2004.

Some canners believe the Council's decision will open the floodgates for more countries to seek the same privileges for their canned production.

Pacific tuna

The European Union has just announced that three European countries have won the right to fish for tuna off the Pacific State of Kiribati.

Up to 23 Spanish, Portuguese and French vessels will receive a licence to fish for tuna in the Kiribati fisheries zone, an area covering 3.5 mn sq km, following an agreement between the EU and the island republic.

The European vessels will join the 1,200 other vessels already fishing in the area for 30 years, from Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines and the US, reports Associated Press.

With half the world's canned tuna supply coming from the central and western Pacific, this ocean offers an annual catch of around 1 mn tonnes of tuna, valued at US\$2 bn.

Kiribati earns several million dollars each year from fishing licenses from Asian countries, and will receive US\$600,000 from the EU for the

new licences for the first year of fishing.

The EU is also investigating further potential deals with other Pacific Island States, such as the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Micronesia and Papua New Guinea.

Precious lives

Owners of fishing boats in **South Africa** will have to insure the lives of their crew, under a new law that is currently being drafted by the South African Maritime Safety Authority (Samsa).

The move follows a spate of drownings off the South African coast this year.

So far this year 16 fishermen have lost their lives, while, last year, 51 commercial fishermen who put out in small craft drowned.

Owners who do not comply with the law will face heavy penalties. The proposed law requires documentation that shows a level of basic training, and will also stipulate that insurance policies should cover casual workers.