

Comment

Towards artisanal fishing zones

The struggle by artisanal fishers in Peru has been in the news of late. They are demanding that the integrity of the five-mile artisanal fishing zone be maintained, in the face of recent moves to open up 'windows of penetration' to allow large-scale industrial fishing in the southern part of the country (see *The Holy Grail*, pg. 21).

Starting in the 1970s, several countries around the world have established artisanal fishing zones. In many cases, the declaration of such zones was a response by States to the growing conflicts between the large-scale and the artisanal sectors, as in India and Indonesia. Faced with increasing and unequal competition from the technologically efficient large-scale sector, artisanal fishworkers in many countries expressly demanded the establishment of these zones.

That such zones can play an important role from a social perspective is undeniable. Millions of people in the developing world depend on fisheries for a livelihood, and a majority of them fish in coastal and nearshore waters. Their livelihoods, as well as the fisheries resource base, are known to be directly and indirectly jeopardized by the activities of industrial and large-scale fleets using destructive gear, such as bottom trawls, in coastal waters.

From a fisheries management perspective too, the logic for the establishment of artisanal zones, where only selective fishing gear and techniques are permitted, is incontestable. Coastal and inter-tidal areas are known to be highly fragile, productive and important as spawning and breeding grounds. As such, a regulation that allows only selective and responsible fishing in such zones, in combination with other management measures, could be very effective.

These issues are to be discussed at a workshop that the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) is organizing early next year, titled *Sustaining Fisheries and Livelihoods in Latin America: The Imperative of Secure Access Rights for Artisanal Fishworkers*.

In deciding on measures that could support the small-scale and artisanal sector, the changing context and the dynamism within this sector must also be kept in mind. It would be inappropriate to see the artisanal zone as a 'box within which the small-scale sector is confined. The small-scale sector, in many parts of the world, as in the Philippines, Senegal, India, Sri Lanka, Peru and Chile, has convincingly demonstrated its ability to harvest highly migratory resources, such as tuna and shark, in a sustainable manner, in deeper waters within the exclusive economic zones (EEZs). To the extent that small-scale fisheries for such species is technologically and environmentally efficient, and leads to socially desirable outcomes such as greater employment and equitable distribution of income, it must be supported through specific policy measures.

Recognizing the artisanal zone is an important first step towards recognizing and supporting the artisanal and small-scale sector. The struggles of artisanal and small-scale fishworkers for maintaining the integrity of the artisanal zone, as in Peru, cannot but be backed. By demonstrating enough political will, States can design and implement fisheries management measures that meet the goals of both equity and sustainability.