

News Round-up

Conch crunch

The Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock (SAG) has decided to ban fishing for shrimp, lobster, winkle and queen conch between 1 March and 30 June in waters of Honduras.

Through Resolution 103-05, published in the official newspaper La Gaceta, the Honduran government has ordered the ban on these species over a four-month period, aimed at "its sustainable exploitation".

For shrimp, the subspecies banned include white, brown, and pink varieties.

As for common lobster, the government has decided to forbid catches until 30 June for industrial fishing vessels operating by way of dive and creel method.

Regarding winkle and queen conch, authorities have ordered a ban for an indefinite period of time.

Moreover, it has been established that those who trade, catch, store or transport any of the species banned during the aforementioned period will be penalized and will have their fishing or trading licence suspended over a period corresponding to one fishing season.

New agreement

The European Commissioner of Fisheries, Joe Borg, announced that the European Commission (EC) is awaiting a response from Morocco to confirm the possibility of negotiating a new fisheries agreement.

"Over the recent weeks, the European Commission has been in touch with Morocco in the first place to discuss the regulations in force over fisheries, but especially to find out whether Morocco is interested in resuming negotiations over a new fisheries agreement," said Borg.

During a press conference held in Brussels, Borg said that "Brussels will wait during 15 days for an answer from the African country," as a technical meeting on the Association Agreement between the European Union (EU) and Morocco is

scheduled for 16 March, in order to discuss agriculture and fisheries issues.

The previous fisheries agreement between EU and Morocco ended in November 1999. The absence of a new agreement was especially detrimental for the Spanish fleet, whose vessels from Andalusia, Galicia, and the Canary Islands had to stop operating in Moroccan fishing grounds.

The EC said some time ago that if new negotiations are initiated, they would try to achieve an agreement for the artisanal and pelagic fleets. This would grant the Andalusian fleet most of the benefits, as the Galician fleet is basically industrial.

Borg said that if Morocco intends to achieve a new fisheries agreement, a series of technical meetings would be held in order to specify the approach of such agreement. Formal negotiations would then begin, in order to reach a consensus over a policy that will benefit both parties.

Pact act

Foreign Minister of South Korea Ban Ki-moon has made it clear that the

government will not consider renegotiation of the 1999 Korea-Japan fisheries agreement, brushing aside concerns this may be a cause of the Dokdo dispute and declaring the islands are "clearly our land."

Ban was responding to growing assertions by some lawmakers that the fisheries agreement played a part in the present dispute sparked by Japanese sovereignty claims to the rocky islands in the East Sea.

At the first session of a National Assembly special committee set up to counter Japanese claims to Dokdo, ruling and opposition lawmakers yesterday strongly called for the fishing agreement to be canceled and

angrily questioned Ban and the government's "quiet" diplomacy.

Korea has maintained effective control of the islands since 1954, but the fisheries accord with Japan placed the area around Dokdo within a joint fishing zone.

The special Dokdo committee has been pushing for a renegotiation to prohibit Japanese fishing boats from operating near Dokdo, to secure the

nation's sovereign control over the islands.

Gift trawl

After a four-week voyage, *Simon Kéghian*, the decommissioned 54-m semi-industrial trawler donated by a non-governmental organization (NGO), Les Amis de Ceylan/Lorient Matara Friendship Association, was handed over to the **Sri Lankan** authorities on 23 March at Galle in the presence of the Minister of Fisheries, the Minister of Reconstruction and the Chief of the Navy, and to the tune of bagpipe music.

The Sri Lankan government is expected to operate the trawler as a patrol and support vessel. The French crew has been put up by the Navy in a training camp close to the sea.

Four other French persons are bound for Matara to follow up on the housing project called 'City of Lorient'.

An anthropologist and a psychologist from a Paris university will join them. This project is being implemented along with another NGO, Enfance et Partage.

Bumper harvests

Radiant, smiling faces can be found among the crowd of residents of Tam Giang in **Vietnam**, welcoming the offshore fishermen on their return home. Reaping bumper cuttlefish harvests is no longer unusual for the commune's fishermen, who, until very recently, were very poor.

Successful fishing harvests have allowed for dramatic lifestyle changes in the central province of Quang Nam. More importantly, many poor residents now have their own fishing vessels, which they have managed to build with bank loans using their houses as collateral.

Despite the failure of a VND51.9 bn (US\$3.3 mn) government-funded project to build 44 ships in the province, the once-poor fishermen in Tam Giang commune now make billions of dong per year from shipbuilding.

Many cash-strapped fishermen are now able to afford new houses and motorbikes. The fishing output from Tam Giang was equal to half that of five coastal communes in the district put together. The industry has created employment for over 1,500 local and nearby residents.

Rights strike

Workers of Holiday Fishing Company

Limited (HFC) at Tema in **Ghana** have gone on a four-hour demonstration to back their demand for a Collective Bargaining Agreement to protect their rights.

They said attempts the Maritime and Dockworkers Union (MDU) made to get management of HFC to negotiate a CBA for its workers since 1999 has yielded no results. This, they said, has left workers being maltreated and cheated by management without compensation.

"We are not entitled to annual leave, any holidays, not even pension and someone who has worked for over 12 years in the company could just be sacked one day without compensation, and this is cheating on the part of management".

They also demanded that 25 out of the 32 Laida sailors who

went to sea on November 24, 2004 but were brought back after 91 days and sacked from the company without any compensation be re-instated.

Ecolabels

Efforts to ensure the sustainability of the world's marine fisheries got a boost

earlier this month when the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

adopted a set of voluntary guidelines for the ecolabelling of fish products during its 26th session, held during 7-11 March.

The new guidelines are aimed at providing guidance to governments and organizations that already maintain, or are considering establishing, labelling schemes for certifying and promoting labels for fish and fishery products from well-managed marine capture fisheries.

The guidelines outline general principles that should govern ecolabelling schemes, including the need for reliable, independent auditing, transparency of standard-setting and accountability, and the need for standards to be based on good science.

They also lay down minimum requirements and criteria for assessing whether a fishery should be certified and an ecolabel awarded, drawing on FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.