



Vol.3, No.2, Year 3

www.fconamar.org

March- April 2008

FOREIGN FLEETS, FISHING SUBSIDIES AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

ILLEGAL FISHING:

The illegal, undocumented and unregulated fishing (IUU) conducted by industrial fishing boats in the high seas and the EEZs of the countries, threaten the sustainable use of the world fishery resources, the food security and the economies of many regions, in particular of those in developing countries.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has condemned the global IUU fishing, urging all States to exercise control over vessels flying flags of convenience to ensure compliance with international conservation measures.

The international community supported the idea of establishing common rules to regulate the controls in fishing ports, with reference to the model proposed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This will allow for the refusal of illegal fishermen in the 'convenience ports', where the fishing boats stop to load fuel, procure supplies, make repairs or unload their catches.

FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE:

In order to circumvent controls and increase their access to resources, unscrupulous ship owners register their vessels under flags of convenience, in countries that will do not exert any surveillance over them. Thus they fish without any respect for international conservation measures and management, and fish illegally in waters of other countries that lack the capacity to patrol their territorial waters.

However, international pressures from regional fisheries management organizations, NGO's and coastal states are increasing, leading countries with open registries to take responsibility for the illegal activities of the international fleets. Even the flag State may suffer trade sanctions that prevent it from exporting a particular product, as considered the ultimately responsible party for the illegal activities.

Panama has faced various penalties for illegal acts of foreign vessels flagged by the country, which shows the need to establish different controls in order to minimize the risks of registering foreign boats and improving the international image of the country.



Longliner with panamanian flag in waters near the Piñas Bay protected area, Darien Province.

For these practices the country has the not very honorable distinction of appearing on blacklists of organizations like the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), North West Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), and the Government of Norway.

Recently, the European Union asked Panama to increase surveillance over their fishing fleet that operates in international waters.

FISHING SUBSIDIES:

Governmental support as well as general and fishing subsidies, are factors that contribute to the increase of pressure over fish stocks.

The main reason for subsidies is food safety and international trade.

In Japan for instance, there are governmental credits for fuel, funding to access foreign fishing grounds, subsidies for shipbuilding and loans for processing fishing products.

Due to the depletion of fish stocks in their countries of origin, as the result of a poor fisheries management that caused a great number of idle boats, it is clear that the survival of high seas fishing enterprises will depend on the access to foreign fishing grounds.



Tuna boats that washed onto a shallow reef during a storm in American Samoa and were subsequently abandoned by their owners. Photo: Wolcot Henry 2005/Marine Photobank.

THE STATUS OF FISHERY RESOURCES:

FAO estimates that 75% of the world's fishery resources are fully exploited, over exploited (or depleted or recovering from depletion). That is why the organization warns about the possibility that the highest levels of catches of fish in the oceans of the world, has already been reached.

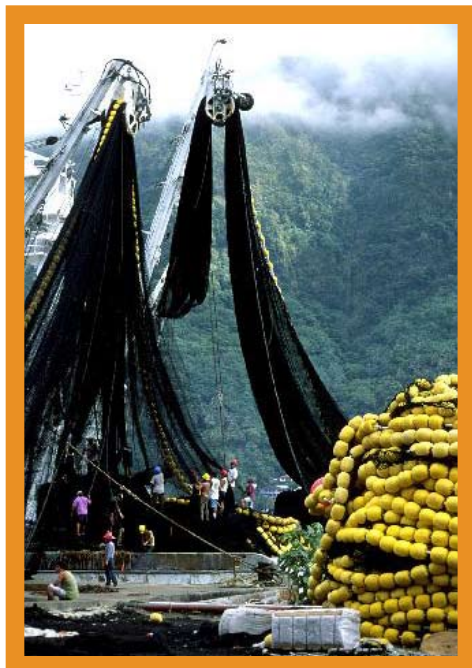
The organization recommends to countries a more cautious and controlled management of their fisheries.

In Europe more than 80% of fisheries are overexploited or depleted. According to assessments of fish stocks recently conducted by FAO, the situation of swordfish in the Mediterranean has changed from fully exploited to overexploited, with catches above sustainable levels.

Spain, a country where fishing has great social and economic implications, is not characterized by a more conservationist position and the fishing activity has put at risk populations of sole, shrimp, cod and bluefin tuna.

The problem is not only overfishing but also illegal fishing and destructive practices. The Taiwanese longliner fleet, for example, is often involved in illegal fishing practices, catches that exceed quotas, "laundering" in the bigeye tuna fishery and a widespread lack of control.

Tuna boat in American Samoa. Photo Wolcot Henry/Marine Photobank



Swordfish caught on longline in Namibian waters. Photo: Maria Hong/Marine Photobank.

ACCESS TO FISHING RESOURCES:

According to the new fishing regimen, access to fishing resources is granted only to those that local fishermen cannot access.

The less developed countries believe that in the rights of foreign licensing they will find a source of revenue (that frequently never reach the public funds, due to the prevailing corruption), joint ventures, or the opportunity to request assistance for the development of national fisheries.

Similarly, the access of foreign fleets to fishing grounds can give the country an opportunity to obtain market concessions.

CENTRAL AMERICA ATTRACTION:

In tropical waters like those of our country the idle international fleets seek to access the migratory species like tuna.

These fleets can be purse seiners or longliners, both destructive to species such as billfish, sharks, dolphins, turtles and seabirds, among the principals.

Foreign boats (Spanish and Taiwanese origin) flagged in Central America, operate in the Eastern Tropical Pacific.

Calvopesca has 4 boats fishing in the Eastern Tropical Pacific with Salvadoran flag. The tuna is processed in a canning plant that operates in El Salvador and the product is exported to Europe and sold locally.

Thus, it is not a coincidence that CALVOPESCA of El Salvador, has signed with the Organization of Fishing and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA) an Agreement of Cooperation for Institutional Strengthening for the Administration of Highly Migratory Species. The Agreement was signed in 2004 and it is updated annually; its fundamental interest is to support activities related with the tuna industry.

Another company that operates with Spaniard capital in Guatemala (Rianxeira Corporation) maintains 4 boats operating in the Eastern Tropical Pacific and has canning facility in Guatemala.

Both companies access the tuna quota of the Central American countries that flagged the fishing boats.

In the other hand, the multinational Pescanova has made important investments in Nicaragua in shrimp aquaculture.

Spaniard capital companies with markets in Japan, continue their struggle to establish operations of tuna farms in countries like Costa Rica and Panama.



Tuna boat in Panamanian waters.

REGIONAL SUPPORT:

The Government of Taiwan made an initial contribution of US\$ 3.2 million to finance the Regional Plan for Fisheries and Freshwater Aquaculture (PREPAC).

With a contribution of US\$ 4.4 million, Taiwan now finances the PRIPESCA, the Regional Project to Support the Central American Integration Process.

Among the goals that the project seeks to achieve, is to boost joint actions for the recovery of species in common and/or migratory species which are commercially important for the Central American region.

The Panamanian experience with the cooperation of Taiwan is not satisfactory as it was responsible for introducing the use of gillnets in the country, a fishing gear that has proved to be extremely destructive.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of Spain (MAPA), also has an important presence in the region through its General Secretariat of Maritime Fisheries (SGPM). It has signed an agreement to promote policies, strategies and projects of fisheries management and aquaculture of regional scope in Central America.

Thus, Spain and Taiwan have become the main support for cooperation to the fishing sector of the Central American region.



RECREATIVE FISHING:

In August 2004 the first meeting between Directors of Fisheries, Tourism and Sport Fishing Leaders of the Central American Isthmus was held. According to the agreement of the Second Intersectorial Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture and Environment in Central America, the objective was to boost the Regional Strategy for the Development of Responsible Sport Fishing associated with tourism, with emphasis on billfish species.

To comply with all agreements of the meeting it was considered a priority to conduct a socioeconomic study of sport and tourism fishing in the region. Funds from the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) were identified, so that the regional organization with the support of the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences of the University of Miami carry out the study.

As the IDB funds were provided by the Spanish government, the Central American regional organization chose the services of a Spanish company, which does not seem to be the most ethical.

Unfortunately the original approach of what should be the socio-economic study was completely distorted and among others mistakes it recommended the conversion of longliner boats to sport fishing activities.

Longliners from Taiwan flies Panamanian flag to fish in international waters.

There remains the question whether an agency that has shown so many commitments with the international commercial fishing interests, is called upon to ensure the sustainable management of billfish that are vital for the sport and tourism fishing industry in the region, and to promote legislation over this activity.

Is the technical assistance aid offered to Central America for the sustainable use of fishery resources for real, or is it an illusion that conceals the true intention of overseas fishing powers?

Time will tell.....



Members of a tuna boat crew shows a dead billfish as a trophy. This occurs daily in the oceans of the world.

THEY ARE DEPLETING OUR POPULATIONS, WE NEED YOUR HELP!



THE SHARKS NEED YOU ALSO:

Support the Shark Conservation Campaign in Panama. Sign the petition in www.marviva.net/tiburón For more information call (507) 208-9444