

Fishworker organizations

A change of guard

The new leadership of Peru's main fishers' organization aims to improve the productive and commercial capacity of the artisanal sector

Viva FIUPAP! Long Live FIUPAP" shouts Victor Solis, Chairman of the Electoral Committee. "VIVAAA!"

The shouts echo off the shiny walls of the auditorium. Tired faces, after an almost sleepless night, light up to cheer their organization, the Federación de Unificación e Integración de los Pescadores Artesanales del Perú (FIUPAP), which has just completed its Sixth Congress in Huampani, a holiday resort some 30 km from Lima.

"Viva FIUPAP!" repeats Ramón Agama, the new Secretary General. And the cry is taken up by Pedro Cornejo, his electoral adversary, Claudio Nizama, the outgoing Secretary, the 109 delegates and dozens of observers from the *caletas*.

With the federation's programme already unanimously approved, it only remained to decide who is to occupy the driving seat during this new phase of the organization. In a highly civilized atmosphere of mutual respect, the fishermen placed their votes for the final decision of the day.

Without any doubt, the demand in which everyone is united is the defence of the five-mile zone as a reserve for the protection of flora and fauna and for the exclusive use of artisanal fishing.

The delegates present at the FIUPAP Congress rejected, without any hesitation, the entire set of rules that had recently attempted to alter this legally consecrated right, and did not hold back in condemning a small group of organizations from the south of the country, who had agreed to the industrial fleet accessing a 37-km corridor bordering the frontier with Chile. Some of

them had already sanctioned the leaders who signed up to this agreement.

In Peru, there seems to be a general consensus on respecting the five-mile zone. At least by word of mouth, government and industry representatives agree on the exclusive rights for artisanal fishing in this zone. The debate has centred on Peru's southern coastal strip, where the bathymetry shows a much steeper falloff than in the north, and, most importantly, the anchovy, the target species of the fishmeal fleet, is found much closer to the coast in the south in winter.

The anchovy—a pelagic species that is very abundant in Peru's rich waters—can support annual catches of more than six million tonnes, except when the El Niño phenomenon dilutes the cold Peruvian Current (also known as the Humboldt Current) and nutrient upwellings are reduced to a minimum. Scientists recognize the presence of two stocks, one north and the other south of parallel 12 degree (more or less level with the capital, Lima). The latter is a stock shared with Chile, and accounts for about 15 per cent of Peru's annual anchovy catches. However, it is the cause of passionate disputes.

The problem is that the industry's processing schedules are established on the basis of catches made during short trips to areas off the coast near to the fish plants. In the south, during autumn, the anchovy occurs in large volumes far from the coast during its northward migration from Chilean waters.

Industrial sector

But in winter, when it moves in the opposite direction, it comes very close to the coast. Thus, the industrial sector, prevented from accessing the resource

due to the pressure of the artisanal sector, accuses its leaders of “working for the Chileans”.

Government representatives argue that the five-mile zone should be strictly respected, but for “geopolitical reasons”, the industrial fleet should be allowed to catch anchovy in this zone in winter. “It is only 37 km long and there are hardly any artisanal fishermen,” they insist.

But the artisanal fishermen fear that if they accept this exception, the “windows of penetration” will be transformed into a heaven for the industry and a hell for them, with growing pressure to extend the “exception”.

The artisanal fleet (some 6,000 vessels) is not allowed to catch fish for fishmeal, although many vessels in the sector—the so-called ‘Vikings’—do it illegally. They are *bolichitos* (wooden purse-seiners) that are on the more capital-intensive extreme of what qualifies as artisanal fishing.

Most of the vessels in the Viking fleet, which number more than 600, are already over 30 gross registered tonnes (GRT), the demarcation limit between the artisanal and industrial sectors. It is a highly dynamic and mobile sector, and most of all, difficult to manage. Frequently avoiding the use of satellite monitoring systems and catching fish that ends up in

the fishmeal plants, it provides yet another battlefield for the artisanal fishermen.

The greater part of the 700,000 tonnes of fish that is caught in Peru for human consumption is provided by the artisanal fishermen. Jack mackerel (*jurel*) forms part of the average diet for coastal Peruvian families.

However, for several years, the star product of the Peruvian artisanal fishery has been the giant squid, or *pota* (*Dosidicus gigas*), which, in size and weight, is larger than a man, reaching such sizes in 14 to 18 months, and dying after spawning. Fishermen catch it mainly by hand jigging, gutting it on board their small boats, and selling it as tubes with skin on at the quayside. Catches are large, amounting to 75,000 tonnes a year, but the prices obtained are miserable.

Export business

“The quayside prices they pay us are 12 centimes (around US\$0.04) per kilo,” said a fishermen’s representative from the north during the FIUPAP Congress. But semi-processed squid products, like frozen open, skin-on, squid mantles, fetch around US\$ 0.60 per kilo on the international market. This is a business that is mainly undertaken by fish buyers and exporters. Artisanal fishermen’s organizations have not yet managed to develop the negotiating capacity to get a

fairer price for their semi-processed landings.

The vast diversity of demersal and pelagic resources caught by artisanal fishermen (some 200-odd species) means that there are several issues that face the sector. However, as in the case of the squid, the problems of income distribution, related mainly to the scarcity of some resources and the low price of others, are common to nearly every *caleta* and inland fishery. Despite the fact that the Peruvian State invests relatively large sums in aiding the sector, with support from international development bodies such as AECI (the Spanish Agency for International Co-operation), these investments still follow the logic of the buyers more than the sellers, assuring a concentration of supply and quality standards, but not distributional equity.

These are not the only problems of a commercial nature. At the FIUPAP Congress concerns were also raised about products coming into Peru from Chile to replace the reduced landings from the artisanal sector in the domestic market.

For Peru's artisanal fishermen, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) is almost a swear word. They are firmly convinced that if Peru adheres to this international convention, it will lose sovereignty over its 200 miles

and an "UNCLOS Committee" (which does not really exist) could decide to let foreign fleets enter this zone, thereby affecting their resources.

What is certain is that the Peruvian Constitution has established 200 miles as the country's territorial sea (or *mar de grau*), and that if the country ratifies UNCLOS, they will have to accept that the territorial sea will be reduced to 12 miles, and the remainder will become part of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). For Peruvian artisanal fishermen, "the defence of the 200 miles for Peru" is as non-negotiable as the defence of the five miles for their sector. And up to now, all reasoned arguments put forward to convince them that there is no danger of foreign fleets freely entering if Peru were to sign up to UNCLOS have proved ineffective.

The FIUPAP Congress ratified this position, recent demonstrations in the south of the country supported this decision, and the new Secretary Ramón Agama, firmly maintains this traditional attitude of the sector.

Emotional goodbye

The emotional and respectful goodbye to the veteran leader Claudio Nizama opened the way to a new generation of leadership. Ramón Agama, representing Sechura fishermen, is a man in his 40s, of a serene aspect, who showed surprise

when his colleagues elected him General Secretary.

He seems like a man with no personal ambitions, and thanked his supporters in simple words. “Artisanal fishing is undergoing definite changes,” he affirmed, “Technological progress is absolutely vital, because fishery resources are becoming scarcer due to overfishing by the industrial fleet and the catch of juveniles, which is hardly controlled.”

Ramón Agama’s main worries include the need for permanent communication with the mass base of his organization, through regional visits and increasing use of email. The new General Secretary believes in working to improve the productive and commercial capacity of the artisanal fishing sector. But he is not abandoning the mother of all battles: the closing of the “windows of penetration” or the “perforations” in the exclusive artisanal zone. That will continue to be one of the main lines of work for FIUPAP. “The windows of penetration are now on standby, and that is a big worry for all of us,” says Agama. “The windows of penetration could serve as a legal instrument that might be used to open up other parts of the coast, using the same arguments as applied in the south. Meanwhile, our bases are alert to any ingress of industrial vessels inside the five miles, and we, as a federation, are also on the alert to ensure that this is not repeated in other parts of the country.”

FIUPAP’s new General Secretary is explicit: “That law should be eliminated, keeping it in suspense is a hidden danger for Peruvian artisanal fishing activities.” 🐟

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