

## Fishworker organizations

## Changing times, changing roles

Artisanal fishermen's organizations in Chile will need new skills and approaches to manage their fisheries

Artisanal fishermen's organizations in Chile were established to unite fishermen and fight for their rights. They are now increasingly required to manage quotas and engage in international commerce, functions that will demand a fundamental transformation of their ethos, style of functioning and *raison d'être*, requiring very different skills, approaches, relationships and management methods.

On 7 August 2006, Chilean artisanal fishermen formally celebrated 20 years of national-level organization. By chance, their celebrations coincided with the establishment of a new fisheries administration under President Michelle Bachelet.

The 2005 report on the artisanal fisheries sector published by the national fisheries service, Sernapesca, ([www.sernapesca.cl](http://www.sernapesca.cl)), records 652 artisanal fishing organizations registered in Chile, with 35 regional federations and two national organizations. Of the 54,751 fishermen inscribed in the Artisanal Fishing Register (RPA), 42,091 belong to some kind of organization. Worker participation in these trade unions exceeds 75 per cent, a much higher level than in other labour sectors in Chile, where the levels of unionization in the total workforce declined from 14.5 per cent in 1991 to 10 per cent in 2000.

Chilean fishing communities organize themselves in *caletas*, or fishing hamlets and settlements. Today 40 per cent of the *caletas* are administered by organizations of artisanal fishermen. But the *caleta* became established as a formally recognized administrative unit only in 1997. Until then, artisanal fishermen faced a highly uncertain future, with the

great risk of alienation and expulsion. No explicit recognition was given to those areas where they carried out the shore-based activities on which their fishing livelihoods depended (landing and repairing their vessels, preparing their fishing gear, processing and selling their catches, and so on).

One main strength of Chile's artisanal fishing communities is the social networks that permeate the *caletas*, which are kept alive by the invisible work of women. These provide links between communities, and make up the social capital and the cultural identity of these people of the sea, who have ancient and deep links with the environment and the resources they extract. These elements—at times, highly visible, as in the case of the mutual support among fishermen at sea, and at other times, concealed—provide a safety net that makes the permanence and very existence of the coastal communities possible.

In 1998, following a national survey, 436 fishing *caletas* were registered along the length of Chile's 4,300-km coast. They were formalized through a Supreme Decree, which officially allocates to each region the name and number of *caletas* by region and province. Today, 453 permanent *caletas* are officially listed, with a further 105 temporary 'landing beaches', where fishermen may land their boats and carry out fishery-related activities on a seasonal basis. Of the permanent *caletas*, 343 or 75 per cent are classified as 'rural'.

### Four categories

Sernapesca classifies registered artisanal fishermen into four categories: seaweed harvesters (*algueros*), boatowners (*armadores*), shellfish harvesters (*mariscadores*) and fishermen (*pescaadores*). In addition, there are unknown numbers

of unregistered fishermen, possibly as many as 20,000.

**I**ndirectly, the artisanal sector generates work for about 250,000 people nationwide, and around 400,000 people belong to family groups who depend on artisanal fishing.

Overall, the fisheries sector employs between 90,000 and 100,000 people, and artisanal fishermen represent around 60 per cent of the workforce. The artisanal sector has witnessed spectacular growth over the last few decades. In the 1970s, the number of registered artisanal fishermen was around 5,000.

Today it is nearly 55,000. Vessel numbers too have grown, from 5,000 in 1992 to 13,776 today. Artisanal fishing is based mainly in the xth Region (32 per cent), viiiith Region (25.7 per cent), ivth Region (10.4 per cent) and vth Region (8.7 per cent).

There are currently close to 14,000 artisanal boats inscribed in the RPA, of which 3,957 are *lanchas* (completely decked motor vessels, up to 18 m long), 8,966 are *botes a motor* (open motor boats) and 1,219 *botes a remo* (open boats propelled by oars). Vessels that qualify as artisanal must be run by an artisanal operator, with an overall length no greater than 18 m, less than 50 gross registered tonnes and which are identified and registered as such by the authorities.

But formal statistics alone provide a gross underestimate of the actual social and economic dimensions of the Chilean artisanal fishing sector. The people involved in the actual fishing activities may be the most important and visible ones in the sector. But associated with them are an undetermined number of people and jobs that make their work possible.

Small boats that employ two or three crew are supported by many other professionals: the porters who prepare the fishing gear and launch the boat from the shore; the *encarnadoras*, women who clean, repair and bait the longlines; the beach officials who are responsible for the sale of the fish; and several others who provide services as filleters, fish transporters and petty traders.

This complex web of social and economic relations is what constitutes artisanal fishing communities, groups of people with their own culture, whose activities are based on a great degree of social co-operation. The highly informal nature of this assemblage makes it extremely difficult to obtain any really representative information.

#### **Domestic market**

Over the decade 1995-2005, fish exports accounted for 11 per cent of Chile's total export earnings. The artisanal fishing subsector contributes 90 per cent of the fresh fish consumed in the domestic

## Conapach: The Voice of Chile's Fishers

Members of Conapach include shellfish harvesters, beach gatherers, divers, seaweed harvesters, *encarnadoras* (women hook baiters), and fishermen. Conapach provides a voice for all those who do not agree with the way the authorities manage the fishery. The fundamental aim of Conapach and its members is to ensure the sustainability of both marine resources and fishing communities.

With the mission of defending the rights of its members and improving the quality of life for Chilean fishing communities, Conapach represents fishing communities in decision-making processes that affect the artisanal fishing sector.

As a national confederation, Conapach supports the strengthening of artisanal fishing trade unions, and strives to improve them professionally, intellectually and culturally. Guided by the maxim "Unity is Victory", Conapach defends the rights of the men and women who belong to the organization.

market, thus playing a vital role in meeting Chile's food security.

But the sector has access to only approximately 28 per cent of the total catch, while generating 30 per cent of the income from fishing. According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the per capita availability of fish in Chile for human consumption is 3.8 kg, but 20.64 kg are available indirectly as animal feed, mainly for the export-oriented salmon aquaculture industry.

In 1965 the Federación Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (Fenaparch) was formed as a national federation of artisanal fishermen. But it ceased to exist in 1973, following repressive measures by the military dictatorship.

The fishworkers' movement was forced underground for the next 20 years, until democracy began its slow return in 1983. In 1986, following a long process of animation and consultation facilitated by

activists from the University of Concepción, a major national meeting of artisanal fishermen was organized.

The 10th National Congress of Chilean Artisanal Fishermen, following the footsteps of the National Congresses organized by Fenaparch, established the National Council of Chilean Artisanal Fishermen. Humberto Chamorro was elected as its first President.

Between 1987 and 1989, regional federations were established in the vth, viiith and xth Regions, and in 1990, the Confederación Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (Conapach, [www.conapach.cl](http://www.conapach.cl)), the Chilean National Confederation of Artisanal Fishermen, was established with the aim of grouping and representing artisanal fishermen's unions (*sindicatos*), co-operatives (*co-operativos*), and associations (*asociaciones gremiales*). Today Conapach is recognized nationally and internationally as the legitimate voice of most of Chile's 60,000 or so artisanal fishermen.

One of the first major challenges taken up by Conapach was to ensure that the interests of the artisanal fishing sector were included in the 1991 General Fisheries and Aquaculture Law. The main achievement was gaining official recognition for the 5-mile zone adjacent to the coast as an area reserved for artisanal fishing, albeit measured from baselines rather than from the most prominent points. Today, many fishermen feel that this zone should be extended to 12 miles, given diminishing resources close to shore. Currently, the main challenge facing Conapach is how to respond to a vastly different political, social, economic and resource situation than what existed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For over a decade, successive administrations have been pushing for radical changes to Chile's 1991 Fisheries Law. This will involve far-reaching modifications to the fisheries management system, and to the property and access rights regimes, towards the adoption of more clearly defined individual property rights with a market-based allocation system.

### Privatization process

Conapach has fiercely resisted this process of privatization, which is seen as

a serious threat to the rights of the artisanal fishing sector, and to the social, economic and political organizations that exist there. The privatization process has divided the artisanal sector and split Conapach, leading to the formation of a second national organization, the Confederación Nacional de Federaciones de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (Confepach), with Humberto Chamorro as President.

The modifications to the 1991 General Fisheries Law proposed by the Chilean government aim to:

- strengthen the regulations that govern the conservation of fisheries resources, safeguarding national interests;
- improve the performance of artisanal fishing activities, and develop the sector's productive capacity;
- maximize the economic growth of the sector, enhance the value added to its products, and increase the application of best practices in the industry associated with fishery extraction; and
- improve and adapt the participation of the sectors involved in the decision-making processes.

To achieve these objectives, resource allocation will be based on a quota system, within an overall total allowable catch (TAC), proportionally allocated to the industrial and artisanal sectors. In the case of the industrial sector, quotas are allocated to individual vessel owners, through the 'maximum catch limit per vessel operator' (LMCA) system. In the case of the artisanal sector, quotas are to be allocated through the 'artisanal extraction regime' (RAE), and the new administration of President Michelle Bachelet has the task of defining how this will operate.

According to the new Fisheries Subsecretary, Carlos Hernández, there are a number of issues to be tackled before the RAE can be instituted. These include replacing the current system of regional or zonal management with a system of management by fishing grounds, with specific management plans for the resources on those grounds. The 'scientific community' will participate in defining the state of resources, and in determining quota and closed-season regimes. It will be the job of the administration to set definitive quotas based on advice given on the TAC range. This may necessitate establishing mechanisms for allocating and managing individual quotas, community quotas, or *caleta* quotas.

#### **Great diversity**

Hernandez also concedes that the sector's diversity demands that a new definition of

artisanal fishing be conceptualized, recognizing at least three main categories: subsistence, small-scale, and highly efficient.

This may require defining, for each category, the nature of the vessels and their areas of operation, and letting each sector be governed by its own set of policies. New forms of worker organizations may also have to be established that are more appropriate for fisheries management than the *sindicatos*. Other priorities for the artisanal sector include setting up auction centres where fishermen will be able to obtain better prices for their products, and establishing social security and savings schemes.

Previously, attempts were made to improve commercialization through setting up fishermen's companies, that is, by turning fishermen into middlemen to trade the produce of their former fishing partners. That move created conflicts and divisions and, in general, failed in many *caletas* across the country. An alternative idea is now being tried out in San Antonio and in the Xth Region, with the construction of artisanal fishing ports. The plan is to create a regulated market where interference and distortions are reduced. Traders will have limited access. Handling and preservation of the product will be improved, and a fish auction will be organized by fishermen's organizations, and made accessible to buyers in a regulated manner.

Recognizing the growing importance of export markets for artisanal fishing, the Chilean government is set to invest in establishing international health and hygiene standards in the development of new artisanal port infrastructure in 14 *caletas* over the period 2007-2009. The development of artisanal ports and the improved commercialization of artisanal fishery products are to be closely associated with the allocation and management of quotas. For this, new forms of more commercially oriented fishermen's organizations may need to be developed, quite different from those that were developed in the 1980s and 1990s to fight for fishermen's rights.

The formation of Conapach (and now, Confepach) and their strong presence in

Chile reflect the deep-rooted tendency for Chile's artisanal fishers to organize themselves. This tendency can be traced to the notorious 1907 massacre of saltpetre workers in Santa Maria de Iquique, when around 3,000 striking mineworkers and their families were slaughtered by the Chilean army for demanding better working conditions. After the massacre, many of those who escaped fled south and settled on the coast, in the *caletas*, where they established self-help societies. These early self-help groups provided the basis of today's artisanal fishermen's unions.

Another key to the organizational tendency of artisanal fishermen is the particular system used for remunerating their activities. The 'share system' is a horizontal form of organization based on a contract through which fishermen arrange how the benefits from the day's fishing are distributed. This is according to the contribution made by each person to the vessel, to the materials used, to financing the operation, and to the work undertaken. It is based on consensual arrangements, of short duration (the time taken up by a day's fishing) and in which every partner makes a contribution to the work, materials or capital, with the profits shared according to the value placed on the different contributions made.

The share system arrangements also apply to different functions provided through a network of horizontal relations, with a high level of risk sharing and reciprocal relationships.

The testimony of Veronica, an *encarnadora* (hook baiter) from the *caleta* of Papudo in the Vth Region, illustrates this: "There are two ways of working: one is the 'share system' (*a la parte*), the other is the 'fixed rate' (*apreciado*). In the fixed-rate system, whether or not any catch is made, you still earn four *lucas*.

#### More risky

In the share system, if things go well for the fishermen, they also go well for the *encarnadora* because the profits are shared, and if things go really well, you can earn even more! If the fisherman earns 20 *lucas* I get 20 *lucas* too, and if he doesn't earn anything, then neither do I. Of course, it is a more risky system. You can chose between the fixed-rate and the share

system. In general, the fixed-rate system is preferred because it is more secure: whether or not there is a catch, you always earn the same. As for me, when there is no catch, I resign myself to my fate, because this is the fisherman's way of life."

**W**hoever contributes to the work of fishing qualifies as an artisanal fisherman and is inscribed in the respective fishery register, and the National Register of Artisanal Fishermen (RPA). Both the boatowners and the crew, being inscribed, possess the rights to participate in the fishery. The 1991 Fisheries Law recognizes the equal right of both people and vessels to be inscribed in the fisheries register, recognizing that the qualified artisanal fishermen are the people who account for the artisanal fishing effort.

In the case of the new fisheries law approved after much polemic debate at the start of December 2002, the State, rather than trying to strengthen social capital "as an element that could contribute to the sustainability of its intervention", is working against it, disregarding the bases that sustain it.

The new law proposes that fishing rights should only be allocated to vessels. The crews' resource access rights are seen as a function of the fisheries activities they may undertake in a vessel authorized to catch a particular species in a particular area; this denies them the fisheries access rights consecrated under the previous law, for which they will now have to depend on vessel licences.

The proposed system will remove the access rights of artisanal fishermen to Chilean fisheries resources. Only the entitlements of vessel owners and shellfish divers to such rights will be recognized. This fundamentally alters the way artisanal fishing is organized, which, until now, has been based on the share system. Productive relationships are now being transformed so that the respective crews are subordinate to, or dependent on, artisanal boatowners and shellfish divers, emphasizing employee-employer relationships.

This monumental decision to regulate the functioning mechanisms and the way

artisanal fishing is organized is based on the bureaucratic need to centralize vessel registration and to reduce the number of actors, while making the process as simple as possible. The de facto removal of fishermen's resource access rights will encourage a process that reduces worker's rights. It could cause unprecedented class conflicts, which may eventually lead to the breakdown of the cultural, organizational and productive composition of the sector.

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