



THE PACIFIC COAST FEDERATION OF FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS

From Fishermen's News of November, 2000

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THE WORLD FORUM OF FISH-HARVESTERS & FISHWORKERS CONFERENCE: A REPORT FROM LOCTUDY ON THE OCTOBER, 2000 GATHERING

By Pietro Parravano, Natasha Benjamin, and Zeke Grader

The intent was to put together an international organization to represent small and mid-size fishing vessel owner/operators, artisanal and subsistence fishing men and women, crew and shoreworkers and the communities they comprise. In the end, not one, but two organizations - multi-national, not global - were the result of the week-long meeting held the first week of October in the French fishing village of Loctudy, along the Brittany coast.

BACKGROUND:

To understand what happened in Loctudy, what was hoped for, what the future looks like for an international movement to represent fishing men and women, and why it concerns many U.S. and Canadian fishermen, it is useful to go back five years to October 1995 in Quebec City. There, representatives of fishing organizations from four continents, concerned that fishing was largely absent from the agenda of the United Nations' Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) Symposium on World Food Security (being held at that time in Quebec City), met to discuss sustainable fishing. The representatives, who were hosted by the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, agreed that the present interest and discussion on fisheries at the international level was meaningless without the participation of the primary stakeholders, i.e., the fishermen and that this participation would only be possible through worldwide political representation in a global forum of primary stakeholders. With that, work began to put together the World Forum of Fish-Harvesters & Fishworkers (WFF). The following statement was issued by the WFF organizers at the close of the Quebec City meeting:

"We, the representatives of small-scale fish harvesters from North America, South America, Africa,



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THE WORLD FORUM OF FISH-BAR/ESTERS & FISHWORKERS
CONFERENCE: A REPORT FROM TOKYO
ON THE OCTOBER 2000 GATHERING

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BACKGROUND

To understand what happened in October 2000, we must first understand the context of the international movement of fishworkers. In 1980, the International Association of Fishworkers (IAFW) was founded in Tokyo, Japan. It is a global organization of fishworkers from over 40 countries. The IAFW has been instrumental in the development of fishworkers' rights around the world. In 1998, the IAFW held its 10th World Forum in Tokyo, Japan. This was a significant event as it was the first time that the IAFW held a World Forum in the Asia-Pacific region. The forum was held in Tokyo, Japan, and was attended by over 100 fishworkers from 40 countries. The forum was a success and it was a landmark event for the IAFW. The following is a report on the forum.

The IAFW is a global organization of fishworkers. It is a movement of fishworkers from all over the world. It is a movement of fishworkers who are fighting for their rights. It is a movement of fishworkers who are fighting for a better world. It is a movement of fishworkers who are fighting for a better future. It is a movement of fishworkers who are fighting for a better life. It is a movement of fishworkers who are fighting for a better world.

and Asia, express deep concern over the reckless plunder of the seas by the large industrialized fleets of the World, leading to a substantial depletion of fish stocks and endangering the food security for millions of people.

"We strongly condemn efforts by various national governments in attempting short-term solutions to their national problems by exporting these vessels to other countries under the guise of various arrangements such as joint ventures, charters, leases, licenses, or bilateral agreements. Equally culpable are the governments which allow the relocation of these vessels in their countries, ignoring the interests of their own fishermen and the safety of their fish stocks. This 'exportation of the crisis' is unethical and leads to further destruction of fish stocks and the replacement of small-scale fish harvesters.

"The depletion of marine fish stocks is due to the worldwide industrial fleet of 25,000 vessels which are creating nutritional problems for millions of people as well as other problems for small scale fish harvesters who have a long term social, cultural and economic dependence on fish resources and are being squeezed out of existence.

"The World Forum promotes sustainable fishing as well as the conservation and regeneration of fisheries resources, and greater protection of all aquatic ecosystems. It advocates a rights-based fisheries in waters under national jurisdiction and a central role for fish worker organizations in fisheries management worldwide. It stands for greater compliance with relevant international agreements in fisheries and advocates tough measures against fleet migration from the North to the South. It takes both an educational as well as a proactive role. It wants fishworkers to be better organized and vigilant."

According to the organizers, the WFF would give the artisanal and small-scale sector - the most significant producers of food from the sea - a major say in international decision-making processes in fisheries development and management. It was welcomed at a time when several governments were critically reviewing their national fisheries policies which had favored the industrial fisheries sector.

"At a time when fisheries management is moving more towards a regional, rather than a national approach, an organization like the World Forum could significantly influence developments in the future. Moreover, now that the ecosystem approach and individual transferable quotas are being increasingly mooted as panaceas for all ills plaguing fisheries management, an initiative like the World Forum, that juxtaposes principles of sustainability with social concerns, will help maintain focus on issues of life and livelihood of fishworkers, along with conservation of fish and fish habitats," said the WFF organizing committee.

A conference was then scheduled for India in November 1997. The primary groups charged with organizing coming out of the Quebec City meeting were the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters (CCPFH) and India's National Fishworker's Forum (NFF). A follow-up meeting on financing and organization was held in Montreal in 1996 and invitations were subsequently sent out for the 1997 conference among selected fishing organizations around the world representing small-scale fishermen with a commitment to sustainable fisheries. The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA) and the Gloucester Fisherman's Wives Association were the two U.S. fishing organizations invited to attend the WFF's 1997 conference.

GOALS FOR 1997 NEW DELHI MEETING:

The following purposes and objectives were outlined by the organizers in the invitation to the 1997 conference:

PURPOSE

"The unregulated operation of industrial fleets, both domestic and international, is responsible for

the depletion of the stock that fish harvesters, both North and South, need for their survival. Having depleted the seas of the North, the industrial vessels are rapidly taking over Southern seas. In countries to the North, like Canada, the closure of the fisheries, in large part due to over-fishing, has deprived entire communities of fish harvesters and fishworkers of their means of livelihood. In the south the consequences of overfishing are even more severe. The 'exportation of the crisis' through poaching or in the form of joint venture agreements between domestic business interests and foreign fishing fleets has put at risk the livelihood of millions of fish harvesters and fish workers, as it has the food security of million of southern consumers for whom fish is an important source of protein.

"The displacement and closure of entire communities due to resource depletion has social and cultural consequences as well. Values of community solidarity, self-sufficiency and sharing are being eroded by the drive towards profit maximization, exploitation and competition led by industrial fleets which underlies and unregulated fishery.

"The profits accruing to the industrial fishing vessels are made not only at the expense of small-scale fishermen and Souther consumers, but also through the unchecked exploitation of the workers on board the vessels, most of whom are from the poorer countries of the South.

"Fisheries development cannot be measured solely by the level of production but, rather, fishing practices must be sustainable and ultimately oriented towards protecting the livelihood of coastal fishing communities. Small-scale, community-based fishermen, who are not just economically, but also socially and culturally, dependent on the fishery, are the best equipped to harvest it sustainably.

"The global nature of the exploitation of workers and the threat to sustainability requires political organization at the international level to propose alternatives that would defend small-scale fishermen's livelihoods and ways of life. As a step towards this, the delegate to the Quebec meeting agreed to convene an international meeting of fish harvester and fishworker organizations in New Delhi in 1997."

OBJECTIVES

"1. To continue the discussion on sustainable fishing among fish harvester and fishworker organizations begun in Quebec City.

"2. To work towards the formulation of a resource management regime that incorporates the common property rights of coastal communities to the coastal sea and its resources.

"3. To work to halt the worldwide depletion of fish stocks by industrial fleets.

"4. To develop a worldwide solidarity organization of fish harvesters and fishworkers as a natural corollary to the globalization of exploitation, in order to propose alternatives that would preserve and nurture the fish resources and the fishing communities that depend on them for their livelihood."

1997 NEW DELHI CONFERENCE:

PCFFA President Pietro Parravano and Angela SanFilipo of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives attended the New Delhi conference as the U.S. delegates, accompanied by a fisherwoman Barbara Stickel of PCFFA as an alternate. Out of the Delhi conference, an interim Coordination Committee was named, that included Parravano, as well as representatives from Canada, India, Chile, France, Senegal, Iceland and The Philippines. Father Thomas Kocherry, chairman of India's NFF and the CCPFH's Francois Poulin were named interim Co-coordinators. A larger conference in Loctudy, France, a small fishing village was scheduled for 2000 for the purpose of bringing in additional fishing associations and adopting a constitution for the organization. The conference also called for an international celebration of World Fisheries Day to bring attention to the importance, as well as

the plight of, global fish resources and fishing communities. The date set was November 21st.

The interim WFF Coordination Committee then held three meetings to prepare for the 2000 conference. One in Brussels (1998) and a second in San Francisco (1999), a final planning meeting was held in France in April 2000, prior to the opening of the Loctudy conference on October 2nd.

As with the formation of any organization there were the usual difficulties. And, this one had its share, given its global scope and language and cultural differences. Finding funding until a formal dues structure could be established was critical with the Canadians playing a key role in working to get the necessary money for travel, staff, etc. There were also the governance questions of how to set the organization up so that it could be representative, democratic and effective. Many of the issues related to governance were to be deferred to the Loctudy conference where a constitution was to be adopted.

Finally, there was the matter of taking official positions on a variety of issues. Although there were a number of pressing issues facing fisheries around the world, the Coordination Committee decided to exercise caution and not commit the WFF to positions on many of these issues until a process could be established (planned for Loctudy) for adopting policies and positions by the WFF. This matter did create some schisms among Coordination Committee members with some wanting to lend the WFF name immediately to some issues, while others did not feel it appropriate to take positions until a formal mechanism was established for decision making on behalf of the organization. The differences, thus, between the members was not on the substance of any given issue, but the process to be followed for the WFF adopting positions. Individual organizations belonging to WFF were, however, encouraged to take stands on the issues during the intervening period, but not use WFF's name.

2000 LOCTUDY CONFERENCE:

The week-long conference got underway as delegates from some 39 fishing nations (Norway, which would have been the 40th did not attend due to a tragic accident involving its delegate) convened in an old Chateau, that had subsequently served as a naval training center and then conference grounds.

The session opened Monday morning, the 2nd, to the sounds of Breton bagpipers who led the delegates into the meeting hall. The spirits were considerably dampened, however, particularly for the French hosts, as news came in that a local fishing boat had gone down in bad weather off the coast of Ireland with the loss of eight lives. Only three aboard the An-Orient survived after being plucked out of the water Sunday by the Irish coast guard. And then on Monday another local fishing boat capsized, but fortunately everyone got off safely.

The Loctudy conference had interpreters scrambling to keep up with translations available to participants in English, French and Spanish. Informal translations were also taking place for those not fluent in these three languages, including some for South Asian, African and Icelandic participants. The number of countries represented had grown from the original 28 that participated in Delhi in 1997, although there were still some notable absences: The Americas were well-represented with the only major fishing countries absent being Venezuela, Peru and Cuba. In addition to Senegal and South Africa, participants at the Delhi conference, the African representation had also grown for Loctudy to include Uganda, Benin, Madagascar, and Mali. But it was obvious more outreach was needed to bring in small-scale fishing groups from such nations as Australia, Japan, the Russian Federation, the U.K., Ireland, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Italy, Spain (although the U.S. delegation had a heavy Italian accent), Greece, Portugal and Morocco, among others.

Representation from the Pacific Coast of North America included Parravano and Pete Hendrickson, a salmon gillnetter from Alaska who is also a Longshoremen's Union (ILWU) representative and board member of the Alaska Marine Conservation Council (AMCC), Natasha Benjamin and Victor Menotti with the Institute for Fisheries Resources, Canadian salmon fisherman and UFAWU member John

Suteliffe, Christine Hunt from the B.C.'s First Nations, PCFFA Executive Director Zeke Grader, Charles Menzies an anthropologist with the University of British Columbia, and Paul Siri, Associate Director of the University of California's Bodega Marine Laboratory.

Two goals had been set out for the week-long conference: 1) adopt a constitution, rules for governance of the organization and officers; and 2) adopt policy positions on some of the major issues facing fisheries, including: pollution (e.g., impacts of oil spills on fish stocks), the affects of the growth of tourism on fishing communities, trade in fish products (e.g., proposed World Trade Organization rules), globalization, and parity for women in fishing operations.

The issue of the constitution and governance, however, came to dominate most of the discussions during the week and policy issues were given shortshrift, which was unfortunate given the high level of agreement on most of the issues by delegates from North and South, first world and third world nations.

Over the week, a few of the big policy issues did get some discussion despite wrangling over the constitution. Daniele LeSauce and Chandrika Sharman presented their paper on women's rights. Much of their call for parity was subsequently adopted into the constitution(s). Trade specialist Victor Menotti, an associate of the Institute for Fisheries Resources (IFR), and co-author of The Fishermen's News article on the World Trade Organization (November 1999), "The WTO: Flying Under Fishermen's Radar" gave a presentation on trade negotiations. (A copy of his paper "The World Trade Organization and Sustainable Fisheries" is available from IFR). Dr. Charles Menzies presented his paper on globalization and Angela SanFilippo made a presentation on oil spill impacts on fish health.

Work on developing policy language was assigned workshops. But as the workshops met, the dispute over the constitution and governance continued. Early on it had been decided that each continent would be given two votes and it is here where the problem arose. The Asian and African delegations were insisting that the continents of North and South America be treated as one continent. This was obviously not acceptable to the representatives from the two American continents and when a vote was held on Friday affirming that North and South America would be treated as two continents, the Asian and African delegations walked out along with the representative of the Maori peoples of New Zealand.

Given the exhaustion of the delegates and some of the rhetoric that had gone on, it would have probably been impossible on that late Friday afternoon to negotiate a compromise that all could have lived with. This was unfortunate, but the good news is that the groups are not that far apart and it should still be possible to forge one strong global organization. It just didn't happen in Loctudy. Given the general agreement on positions on most of the significant issues facing fish stocks and fishing communities, policy at least, should not be a divisive issue in putting together an all-inclusive international organization to represent the interests of small and mid-scale fishermen and fishworkers. Moreover, most of the delegates on both sides of the governance issue have vowed to remain close, hoping to resolve the differences.

It is good to report that the WFF has a constitution and an approved procedure for adopting policies and positions. One of its responsibilities is to engage new member organizations that share the same beliefs. Daniele LeSauce (France) and Humberto Mella (Chile) were elected Co-Coordinator and Francois Poulin (Canada) was named Secretary-General.

In addition to the myriad of threats facing fish resources and fishing communities, including multinational corporate fishing operations, industrial aquaculture operations, pollution and habitat destruction, trade rules that threaten fish conservation and traditional fishing operations, and attempts at privatization of fish resources that could make sharecroppers out of fishermen, the Loctudy conference came on the heels of the news that some of the largest fish processing firms from around the world had formed a cartel calling itself Seafoodalliance.com. The need for some form of

organization to represent the smallest and weakest sector of the fishing industry, but at the same time the backbone of fisheries, has probably never been as apparent as now. The question is whether the Loctudy experience will simply discourage participants from further pursuing a global alliance or give them hope that differences can be resolved with a little more time and patience and a willingness to compromise.

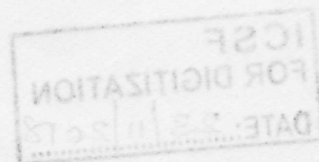
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