

MODERN HISTORY OF THE FISHERMEN'S MOVEMENT
OF BRASIL SINCE THE EARLY NINETIES

1710 4.0.86
DC /COH2/C3A 14

Fishermen, the forgotten people

Due to the geographical extension and the diversity of the different regions of Brasil, there is no real national organisation which unites all of the fishermen of the country and represents their interests. Estimates indicate that there are around 500.000 artisanal fishermen in Brasil, of which about 40.000 in the state of Ceara.

There are various regional or state organisations which act separately, action which is limited due to the lack of financial resources and the dispersion of entities of different characteristics, such as fishermen's colonies, state fishermen's federations and fishermen's movements which are mostly unknown to the individual fishermen.

MONAPE (Movimento Nacional dos Pescadores) is the entity that has made an effort to unite the different regional and state movements in Brasil, is lobbying in Parliament and maintains contacts with international fishermen's organisations.

In 1993 an informal fishermen's movement took shape from the little village of Prainha do Canto Verde in the state of Ceará, incentivated by René Schärer, a swiss airline executive who had decided to abandon his professional career and dedicate his know-how to a privately financed development project. An initiative to show that artisanal fishing is sustainable and to bring to the attention of the public and the authorities the difficulties and situation of abandon of artisanal fishermen and women, which has been worrying leaders of fishermen's movements and to ring the alarm bell about predatory fishing of lobster, the threat to living space of natives by savage real estate speculation and the uncontrolled development of mass tourism.

S.O.S. Survival creates awareness

The trip of the Jangada S.O.S. Survival had considerable repercussions in the national and international media. The sailcraft left from the beach of Prainha do Canto Verde in the state of Ceará on April 4, 1993 with 4 fishermen (Edilson Fonseca Fernandes, Mamede Dantes de Lima, Francisco Abilio Pereira and Francisco da Silva Valente) being accompanied along the coast with a small car by 2 women from the village

A. J. N. 2152
MEG. NO. 2155

(Marlene Fernandes de Lima and Michelle Schärer - a graduate in zoology from the University of Central Florida) who were responsible for support services such as supplies, communication, press relations and the organisation of meetings with fishermen's -, environmental- and human rights groups along the route with 20 intermediate stops. 74 days later the brave travellers arrived in Rio de Janeiro where they were welcomed by a large crowd, representatives of NGO's authorities and the media.

The expedition was a spontaneous reaction to the intolerable situation and the desire of several fishermen to show their bravery and repeat the trip of 4 fishermen back in 1941 under the leadership of "Jacaré", made famous by the American movie director Orson Welles, who filmed the story during a stay in Brasil amid controversy due to the tragic death of "Jacaré" and the political pressure applied by the Military Government of Getulio Vargas and the U.S. State Department. The film never finished by Orson Welles, was finished by Paramount and released under the title "It's all True" in 1994. The expedition S.O.S. Sobrevivência was planned and carried out by René Schärer with \$ 20.000 inherited from his Godparents. Several young volunteers from the Federal University of Ceará worked hard to make the trip a success. None of the Government agencies supported the protest trip and four days the organiser was advised by the Commander of the Port Authority Navy in Fortaleza that the Navy had refused the authorization for the trip. The expedition members simply ignored the information and launched off to sea.

During the 74 days the 8 NGO's which supported the protest trip, organised 4 seminars to discuss the themes of the voyage with the participation of the public, NGO's, fishery specialists as well as fishermen- and women from the state of Ceará. Concrete proposals for solutions were subsequently sent to federal, state and municipal authorities; NGO's throughout Brasil and a large number of fishermen's organisations.

Unfortunately the well intentioned initiative did not find the desired echo with the authorities, be it the State Government of Ceará, IBAMA (Brazilian Institute for the Environment of the Ministry of Environment) or any others that should be concerned about the environment natural resources and its economic, social and ecological importance. Both Brasil's President Itamar Franco and Ceará's Governor Ciro Gomes refused to receive the members of the expedition and their proposals. There was absolutely no dialogue with the Director of IBAMA), despite the fact that predatory fishing of lobster by divers capturing large amounts of immature individuals was

getting worse by the day causing economic damage to the whole fishing industry, loss of taxes to the state and increased violence in the sea between artisanal fishermen and pirate ships. The lobster harvest fell from 2'700 tons in 1991 to 1'900 tons in 1994, the lobster industry was totally demoralized and suffering heavy losses, while the activities of pirate ships, capturing lobsters with illegal instruments and destroying the fishing material of artisanal fishing crafts, reached incredible proportions. It seemed that with the exception of artisanal fishermen, whose survival depends on fishing, nobody seemed to be very interested in the problem. Industrial fishing firms who had been heavily subsidised over the years were getting ready to move out of the business or waited for disaster to strike. The only positive fact was that civil groups that have been working with artisanal fishermen for some years moved closer together, and under the leadership of René Schärer the Movement of Artisanal Fishermen of Ceará (MOPECE) together with the NGO "Institute Terramar" founded in 1994, to continue the mission of S.O.S. Survival, started to look for solutions.

The History of Redonda to follow

The History of Prainha do Canto Verde to follow

Artesanal fishermens survival is at stake

The Governor of the State of Ceará, Mr. Ciro Gomes, who had never responded to the proposals of the organisers of the protest trip, went as far as stating to an american journalist that the Artisanal Fishermen belonged to the Museum and the people behind the movement were a bunch of european romantics. At the end of 1993 the totally incompetent director of Ibama went into early retirement, and for the fishermens luck the new director José Augusto Negreiros Aragão a graduate in Fisheries-engineering of the University of Ceara's Labomar brought along intimate knowledge and a lot of experience in fishing. Most important, he quickly recognised that the solution of the problem could only be found through dialogue with all interested parties. He was the first official who recognised the fundamental importance of the fishermen's movements as a partner in the solution. This was the beginning of the exchange of information between fishermen, Ibama, NGO's and the scientists which finally resulted in a detailed proposal and a call for an all out effort to bring the problem under control. The proposal ended up in some drawer in the Environmental Ministry in Brasilia.

During the first months of 1995 the problem deteriorated even further due to the total disregard of a large number of boats with illegal fishing-gear (divers) of the four month protection period from January to April. Despite an avalanche of denunciations by fishermen there was practically no enforcement in the sea or on the ground due to lack of money and political will of Ibama in Brasilia. The illegal lobster fleet by now was three times the size of the legal one.

At this point a consensus started to grow between fishermen, lobster firms, legal boat owners, Ibama and scientists that the situation had become unsustainable. But what should be done to reach the highest sphere's of the State Government and the President of Ibama in the capital of Brasilia? Once again the fishermen of Prainha do Canto Verde followed their leaders advicee and invited fishermen of neighboring fishingcommunities to a meeting. Here the decision was taken to make one more final attempt to fight for their survival. On April 4, 1995 (anniversary of the trip to Rio de Janeiro) 500 fishermen from 8 communities assembled in front of the State Government Palace and a delegation handed the "Letter of Prainha do Canto Verde" to a representative of the Governor Mr. Tasso Jereissati. Letters were also handed over to representatives of Ibama and the Navy.

The timing was right. The State Secretary for Urban Development and Environment was asked by the Governor to invite all organisations and authorities involved for a meeting to analise the cause of the problem and to find solutions. Shortly thereafter the new President of Ibama was cornered by representatives of the fishermen during a visit to Fortaleza who managed to present their case and awaken his immediate interest.

In April the first meeting was held and the "Forum of Fishing" was called into life which would be meeting once a month to find a solution for the lobster crisis and subsequently discuss the future of the whole fishing industry.

With the march on the capital the fishermen's movement really came to life and in the monthly sunday-meetings of the fishermen, where their reivindications are discussed and proposals to the Forum are formulated, between 150 and 200 men and women participate, coming from as far as 600 kms away.

In the meeting of the Forum in May, Dr. José Augusto of Ibama presented a proposal to work out a longterm development plan to recover lobster stocks over the next 15 years. A committee was formed to come up with a plan within 90 days and of the 11 members, 6 represent the interests of fishermen with the other

5 representing Ibama, State Government, Lobsterfirms and the small- and mediumboatowners. The Fishermen's Movement had finally conquered their place and will now have an important voice in the development and implementation of Fishing Policy for the State of Ceará and who knows, throughout Brasil.

The battle of the Artisanal Fishermen to be recognised as an important factor in the production of fish fits in well with the philosophy of the international fishermen's movement, as one can see from the "NGO Treaty about Fishing" of June 1992. Artisanal fishing is responsible for over 50% of fish capture worldwide and by far the most sustainable art of fishing, consumes less renewable resources (energy) and doesn't produce any by-catch. To the contrary industrial fishing, aside from being subsidised to the tune of \$ 50 Billion a year, is the main responsible for fishing conflicts around the world, causes overfishing in close to 70% of the seas, millions of tons of fish are wasted every year as by-catch and uses large amounts of non-renewable energy. Every time new technology and larger ships are launched to the sea the problem of overfishing becomes more serious.

The solution for sustainable fishing will be found through the strenghtening of artisanal fishing at the same time guaranteeing the survival of millions of families of fishermen, while providing other millions of poor families with the animal protein they need.

Thus, the "Forum of Fishing" in Ceará can be considered a pioneer step, uniting fishermen, fishing industry, Government, Environmental Authority and the University to look for solutions for the sustainable development of ocean resources. Thanks to the persistence of a few fishermen a first step into the right direction has been taken, but a lot more steps have to follow in the months and years to come.

The Managment Plan for Lobster Fishery

In portuguese "Plano de Ordenamento para Pesca da Lagosta" is the first result of the creation of the Fishery Committee of the State of Ceará. A document which was produced by a working group withing the Fishery Committee and makes a diagnostic of the present situation of this important natural resource (1995), which is overfished and presents down do earth solutions. In less then 90 days, the group presented the Managment Plan to the Fishery Forum where it was approved by an overwhelming majority. The plan makes an analisis of the present fishing effort, the sustainable capture of lobsters and tries to establish the ideal fishing effort. This is

followed by a plan to recover stocks over a period of 15 years and includes a plan to restructure and if necessary reduce the fishing effort through negotiations as well as other measures to achieve the objective. The measures are divided into the following categories:

1. Fishing legislation
2. Enforcement
3. Environmental Education
4. Research
5. Investments and support for the diversification of fishing
6. Administrative measures

The responsibilities were divided into specific categories and for the different segments of the fishing industry and Federal, state and municipal authorities:

IBAMA (Federal agency responsible for environment and fishing)
Port Authorities of the Navy
Artesanal Fishermen
Union of boat owners
Fish processing firms and exporters
State Government
Municipal Government
Universities
NGO's
Internal Revenue Service of the Federal Government
Internal Revenue Service of the State Government
Food Quality Control Agency
Federal Police
Military Police
Civil Police

In July of 1995 the Management Plan was presented to the President of Ibama, Dr. Raul Jungmann during a visit to Fortaleza. He praised the Plan as an example for the whole country on how to solve environmental problems and achieve sustainable development through the joint effort of society and government. He decided to require all Ibama directors to create local fishery committees and to draw up their regional management plans based on the model of Ceará. He also promised total financial support to guarantee the enforcement of fishing laws in the sea and on land.

Thanks to the untiring efforts of the representatives of artisanal fishermen and mobilization of the fishermen the most urgent measures were introduced with unusual speed and efficiency. The first results were very positive but it also became evident that the implementation of the whole plan would be difficult due to the lack of financial means and the lethargy of all Government Agencies involved.

The law enforcement ship "Natureza" which Ibama used in the past for enforcement of fishing laws in the sea, hardly ever made it out to the sea due to its poor operating condition, endless redtape. Poorly paid Ibama agents show very little motivation to go around the sea risking their lives. Once the "Natureza" made it to sea it could not keep up the speed of the boats that it was supposed to catch.

The artesanal fishing community came up with the solution; buy a boat and put it at the disposal of Ibama, thus practically forcing the agency to live up to their responsibility.

The fishermen of Redonda (Icapui) all chipped in R\$ 100.00 (\$ 100.--), which for them is a lot of money, and could count on the help of other communities. Thus they raised half of the required R\$ 40.000.00 and went knocking on other doors to raise the rest such as:

Municipal Government of Icapui
IBAMA
State Government
Fishermen's Movement of Ceará
Union of boat owners
Amigos de Prainha do Canto Verde.

Enforcement operations began in July of 1995 with a crew of fishermen, 2 agents of Ibama and 3 military police. The fishermen paid their share of operating costs (fuel, food, crew salaries and tips for the police agents) since the financial means of Ibama were insufficient (despite the Presidents promise). The main target were clandestine boats, which were fishing without license, with divers (which is forbidden), armed and more often then not with the crew under the influence of drugs (divers seem to be able to stay down longer). Within 2 month the boat "Monsenhor Diomedes", baptized after a priest who was instrumental in developing the community spirit in Redonda, stopped over 40 pirate boats, confiscated illegal equipment and catches, mostly of undersized lobsters, several crewmembers were arrested. The enemy was taken by surprise, but not without resistance. On one occasion the boat was circled by 5 boats who threatened to

sink it to the bottom of the sea, this time the crew thought better to avoid the confrontation raced to the safety of the home port. On at least two other occasions the Military Police used firearms to force the fugitives to stop and one of the Ibama agents was attacked by a fishermen with a knife during the search of a pirate boat. Three of these incidents are awaiting judgement at the Maritime Court of the Navy in Rio de Janeiro. Several members of Fishery Committee and one Ibama agent received death threats, that fortunately were not carried out.

The results far exceeded our expectations and after August there were very few pirate ships active. The patrols continued with less intensity through the period of January to April, when lobster fishing is prohibited. In this period only two clandestine boats were reported and taken into custody.

Slowdown at Ibama

In the aftermath of the election of a new President of Brasil, most of the Ibama directors changed for political reasons and we lost the number one supporter of the committee, José Augusto. The newly appointed Ibama director in Fortaleza, Dr. Carlos Barboza Nogueira does not have a fishing background, and thus the obscure forces within the organisation were able to slow down the process, which had begun so well. The representative of the processing and export industry, Mrs. Elisa Gradvohl, abandoned the meetings of the committee, feeling that we were just losing time and the representative of the State Government didn't like the pressure exerted by the other members, who asked for a clear definition of the governments role in the committee, financial support and a meeting with the Governor Dr. Tasso Jereissati.

While the Fisheries Department at Ibama in Brasilia was working on a consolidated version of the management plan to include the other states with lobster fisheries only the measures in the responsibility of the fishermen advanced, while especially the Government Agencies came to a virtual standstill. A meeting called to take place in Recife with Fisheries Committees of the other northeastern states to debate the Management Plan, was cancelled due to "lack of funds" at a weeks notice; confidential information from friends at the Ministry of Environment contradicted this story. It is quite obvious that certain obscure forces within Ibama and the fishing sector of other states were not at all interested that the plan be implemented. Only later, in April 1996, did we learn that the Ibama chief in Mossoro, Rio Grande do Norte - coastal area with one of the greatest concentration of clandestine divers - had never even heard of the "Plano de

9

Ordenamento" and much less existed there a Fisheries Committee. Incidentally, the draft version of the consolidated management plan is practically a copy of the Ceará Plan, with very few insignificant additions.

There obviously exist, a lot of people (which we call obscure forces) who are very interested in the continuation of chaos, because the traffic in undersized lobsters is big business with fantastic profits. The illegality of the business continues on land, where illegal shipments are smuggled past control posts of the treasury or in front of blinded treasury agents to be exported from the ports of Recife or Santos to the markets - Japan and to a lesser extent the USA and Europe, which pay high prizes for small lobsters. Illegal lobsters are commonly bought from ignorant fishermen, pirate boats or disembarked during the night from other lobster boats by crewmembers at \$ 4 or \$ 5 to be exported for \$ 20 per kilo. The very few firms that deal in this kind of traffic keep alive a well oiled corruption scheme for Ibama and Police Agents.

After the Recife Meeting was cancelled the management plan was totally ignored by the Ibama people in Fortaleza and Brasilia, instead of implementing all the measures which were of the responsibility of Ibama the assistant to the Ibama chief of the state of Ceará (part of the obscure forces) proceeded to relicense the lobster fleet in a way totally contrary to what was determined in the Management Plan.

One committee member also discovered that Ibama failed to live up to the agreement with the Navy for law enforcement support. In exchange for the boarding of Ibama agents on routine missions between Natal and Belem, Ibama would pay for the fuel (the Navy has no money for fuel due to cost cutting by the Federal Government). During 1995 several missions were carried out, but Ibama failed to pay for the fuel.

The strategy for the registration of lobster licenses used by the Fisheries Committee was simple and coherent considering that two thirds of the fleet was operating illegally. Register all the fleet in order to know the real size of the fleet and the relative fishing effort and then proceed to a reduction of the fleet if necessary. It had been very clear in the committee that all the boats using sails should be legalized, since its fishing effort is very small and can in no way be made responsible for overfishing and because of its social importance and economic survival of over 30'000 families. Besides the fact that the fishermen's movement is the principal factor for the existence of the Fishery Committee.

The assistant to the director of Ibama took advantage of the directors vacation and without consulting with the members of the Fisheries Committee (which he does not respect) implemented a relicensing plan determined by a short sighted bureaucrat in Brasilia.

Only owners of licenses could apply for renewal. Until the deadline of March 15 only 400 licenses were renewed, thus leaving about 1500 boats that had been fishing in 1995 in the illegality. He boasted that the department of enforcement in Brasilia was determined to provide the financial means to enforce the law against the non-licensees, which obviously is a joke, knowing that Ibama was unable or unwilling to assume all the costs of enforcement in the sea in 1995 and during the embargo period of January to April 1996, still owing over \$ 4.000.-- to the fishermen. The situation thus created was simply unenforcable, and would certainly leave a lot of boat owners vulnerable to extortion by the obscure forces within Ibama.

At the same time the President of Ibama, Dr. Raul Jungmann had totally forgotten the Management Plan that he had praised so eloquently. He never responded to a Fax sent by the Committee and repeated six times. The representative of the Governor in the Committee didn't resist the pressure of the other members and threw in the towel in January 1996 after repeated request to define the role of the state government and for an audience with the Governor. He thus informed the members that his department was no longer in a position to give the necessary support to the committee, promised however that he would inform the Governor in order to determine which government agency would be best suited to take his place.

In February the Governors Council for Sustainable Development in a meeting with the fisheries sectors accepted the pressure of the committee and sent a recommendation to the Governor to the effect that an urgent decision was needed to decide the future of fisheries.

There seems to be a growing awareness in the public and government circles that the country has totally neglected the fishing sector over the last 40 years. This has led to the absurd situation that Brasil with a coast line of over 6000 miles today imports more fish than it exports and even more absurd imports fish from countries like Uruguay whose coast line is less then 5% the size of Brasil's.

In the meantime the representatives of the artesanal fishermen presented argumentations as to why the close to 1000 sailboats could not be excluded from the lobster fishery, over the objections of the obscure forces, the request was approved by the Ibama chief in Fortaleza and sent to Brasilia.

Some of the committee members were able to show to the Ibama manager Carlos Nogueira, that he had been misled by his own advisers and he started to work closer with the committee. It was thus decided that in order to get the Management Plan out of the drawers and avoid a serious crisis at the opening of the lobster fishing season public and political pressure on the Ibama President was needed urgently.

A meeting with a group of Senators and Congressmen representatives of the state of Ceará in the Congress was arranged in order to gain their support and the committee launched a press campaign at the same time. Again the meeting was cancelled for some shadowy reason, but on the same day the committee member, René Schärer, met with a Congressman on his way to Brasilia and enlisted the support of the Ceará representation. Supported with an intensive press campaign the lobby effort paid off.

A meeting with the President of Ibama was scheduled for April 24 in Brasilia, but after his return from a trip to Europe the meeting was rescheduled for April 27 in Belem where he was scheduled to be from 24 to 27 of April. The committee members were determined to meet with him anywhere in Brasil before the deadline of May 1st.

Another meeting with the secretary of the Governor had been scheduled for April 23 where the demands for a definition by the State Government were accepted and four government agency henceforth will participate with the fisheries committee.

On April 24 the President of Brasil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, reshuffled his cabinet and influenced by the massacre of 19 landless farmers by the Federal Police in Eldorado in the State of Para, nominated Dr. Raul Jungmann to the post of Minister for Land Reform. As a result of the pressure of the committee Dr. Jungmann dispatched his assistant to Fortaleza to meet with the committee on April 26.

Dr. Aécio Gomes de Matos met with the committee members and facing the strong argumentation had no choice, but to accept all their requests:

Official recognition of the committee as the determining body for fisheries

Implementation of the Management Plan within two months

Licensing of the complete lobster fleet that had been fishing in 1995

To make an extreme effort to enforce the law which prohibits the capture and sale of undersized species

To provide financial means for the operation of the fishermen's police boat "Monsenhor Diomedes"

To install a radio communication system on board of "Monsenhor Diomedes"

To pay for costs incurred by the fishermen in 1995 and 1996, which had not been paid due to the lack of money at Ibama

Ibama to sign agreements for the support of enforcement of fisheries regulations with the Navy, Federal and State Treasury Departments, Military and Federal Police

Most of these measures have been published in the official government publications. With the added experience in lobbying and mobilizing press and public support the committee will continue to pressure the Government Authorities and specially the new President of Ibama Dr. Eduardo Martins to keep the momentum going.

The emancipation of the fishermen

Until 1991 the fishermen were practically abandoned by Society and Authorities and they suffered from a serious case of lack of self-esteem. With the events of the last five years this has changed dramatically.

Today the fishermen which participate of the newly formed Movement believe in their future and also start to recognize their responsibilities. Who conquers freedom needs to assume his responsibility. Several of the communities who have so successfully fought to have their enemies and the predators

chased over the sea are now recognizing that they themselves are responsible to preserve the ocean resources. Only last year under the pressure of survival they themselves were guilty of capturing juvenile lobsters. Today they enact their own laws of the beach and enforce them on themselves and make sure that other fishermen respect the regulations to allow the reproduction of the species. Not long ago fishermen robbed other fishermen of their miserable catch, today they agreed on a set of laws and punishment against pilverage of fishing material. The participation at the monthly meetings of the Fishermens Forum is growing month by month and its meetings are extended to other coastal areas, alliances are forged with Fishermen in other States, such as Rio Grande do Norte.

The campaign against the illegal fishing by divers has been so successful that former enemies have become allies. Just a few days ago the Fishermens Forum was held in Fortim, Ceará which only a year ago was one of the principal strongholds of the pirates; the owner of 8 boats that were fishing illegally in 1995 - Francisco Augusto - responsible for the attacks against the boat "Monsenhor Diomedes" - attended the meeting, confessed that he was wrong in the past and personally confirmed what we already knew; his boats are fishing with legal fishing gear and are doing well.

We have come a long way and there is still a long way to sail but the Sea seems to be calmer now and the sailing promises to be much smoother.

Prainha do Canto Verde, May 22, 1996

More to come