

# News Round-up

## Free crossing

Skippers in **Scotland** can breathe a bit easier, now that their government has scrapped the bureaucratic division between the country's two main fishing grounds.

For generations, these fishermen had to inform the authorities every time their vessels crossed the 4 degree West line separating the North Sea from the West Coast fishing grounds.

Scottish fishermen wanted these discriminatory rules thrown out, after a European Union decision to allow Spanish crews access to West Coast waters from 1 January 1996.

The deal, agreed in Luxembourg in October 1995, gave Spanish

crews the limited right to fish in British waters without reporting their catches.

## Waterworld

Reporting in a couple of years time will be the Independent World Commission on the Oceans, headed by Portuguese President Mario Soares. It has

begun work on a three-year project on how to utilize and protect the world's maritime resources.

The commission will draft a report on issues related to oceans to be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly in 1998.

Members of the commission, numbering 40, include former Netherlands Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, Yoshio Suzuki, the chief counselor of Japan's Nomura Research Institute, and Nobel laureate and former Costa Rican President, Oscar Arias.

The commission will consult governments, NGOs and scientists on issues like exploration and exploitation of the sea ad seabed, fisheries, pollution and the dumping of hazardous waste, and the prevention of conflicts over marine resources.

## Incensed

Such conflicts, however, are unlikely to end immediately in the fisheries sector of **India**, where artisanal fishworkers have been fighting against deep-sea joint ventures in India waters. Their operations will decrease the already fast depleting stocks of fish resources.

The campaign was co-ordinated by the National Fisheries Action committee against Joint Ventures. Recently, it won a victory of sorts when a government committee

recommended that no more licences should be granted for such ventures. However, Thomas Kocherry, the convenor of the Action Committee, says the issue will not be solved until all past licenses are revoked.

## Trading in trouble

Some kind of deprivation is in store for the fishermen of **Taiwan**. In the wake of the free trade regime set up under APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation), both competition and

pollution have increased as new industrial units come up, especially on the west coast of Taiwan. This trend is likely to put pressure on marine resources.

These problems were spotlighted at the NGO Conference on APEC in Osaka in late November 1995. Ko Mei-Na, a staff member of the Fishermen's Service Centre in Taiwan, felt that trade liberalization may push down the price of fish, as happened in the case of agricultural prices.

## Legal update

Pushed out of the fishery—that's what is likely to happen to the smaller,

community-based fishers of **Canada** as a result of the December 1995 update of the Fisheries Act.

This is the first major rewrite of the Act since 1968. It seeks to

'streamline' the process of regulating fisheries, devolving control from the federal government to the provinces.

The new Act will allow the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to enter into agreements with any organization on matters relating to harvest limits, fishing licences, etc. This means that the DFO will probably negotiate with the larger players in the fishery. This will increase privatization and marginalize the smaller fishers.

To be fair, though, the DFO does recognize 'six guiding principles' for fisheries management. These include the need for conservation as well as aboriginal rights to fish resources.

## Stock up fast

Conservation was evidently on the minds of officials of the European Union and Norway when they agreed on sharp cuts in mackerel, herring and plaice catches over the next two years. The aim is to protect the threatened North Sea. Total Allowable Catches (TACs) were set for 1996 with a commitment to further cuts in 1997 based on

scientific advice. The agreement affects mainly British, Dutch and Danish fisherman.

For the first time, the EU and Norway adopted a longer-term approach towards restoring stocks to a healthy state while taking account of fishermen's vital economic interests.

The negotiations were far from smooth. Norway would have preferred a quicker reduction. But an EU official said that it signalled the start of a more coherent effort to rebuild stocks.

### ***Fish as food***

Such enthusiasm also marked the outcome of the International conference on the Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security, held in Kyoto, **Japan** from 4 to 9 December 1995.

The conference was conducted in the context of earlier efforts like the FAO World Fisheries Conference in 1984 and the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Rome Consensus on World Fisheries adopted at the FAO Ministerial Conference on Fisheries in March 1995.

Ninety-five countries took part in the Kyoto discussions, which focused on the significant contribution of fisheries to income, wealth and food security, especially in

low-income food-deficit countries.

This can be achieved in several ways like rapid technology transfer, minimizing post-harvest losses and ensuring improved control of fishing activities in areas under national jurisdiction.

### ***Sustained effort***

Some of these issues are likely to be also discussed at the forthcoming meetings in New York, the US of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

The formal meetings will occur over the period 18 April to 3 May. On 24 April the meet will focus on issues related to Small Island Developing States.

Prior to this, there will be a two-week preparatory meet, which will also focus on the sectoral issues of oceans and atmosphere. This will be one among the several areas of concern at the meet.

But NGOs working on fisheries hope to place on its agenda the issue of overfishing and excess fishing capacity. On the last day, the Chair will adopt the agenda for the 1997 session and adopt the report for this year's CSD.

### ***Save our coasts***

Adopted unanimously was a declaration by the

Save the Coast Movement' at Paradeep, Orissa, India. Farmers, fishermen and agricultural workers called on the rich nations to boycott shrimp consumption. It also appealed to NGOs

like the Mangrove Action Project, the Consumer Association of Penang and the Third World Network to think of a campaign along these lines.

Further, the Paradeep convention urged State governments to make sure that existing laws are implemented. These would preserve the people's rights to land and environment.

Delegates also called for new legislation to put an end to the rising trend for intensive and extensive aquaculture projects.

### ***Ok, Friends again?***

Hopefully putting an end to disputes are the subcommittees set up under the Thai-Malaysian joint Commission.

These, the prime ministers of **Thailand** and **Malaysia** agreed,

will tackle all fishing disputes. The two prime ministers expect this process will be a long-term solution.

Malaysia has recently released some Thai fishermen imprisoned for poaching in Malaysian waters.

Thailand now wants Malaysia to release three other Thai fishermen as well as a trawler detained in Malaysia.

Perhaps as a show of goodwill, Thailand said it would continue to support the idea of the

East Asia Economic Caucus(EAEC), proposed by Malaysia.

### ***Thrown into jail***

But not everyone is happy with Malaysia. Late last year, the marine division of its Fisheries Department detained 30 fishermen from Sumatra, **Indonesia** for allegedly fishing in Malaysian waters. They were aged between 15 and 72.

Their trawler, some fishing equipment and about 900 kg of fish were also seized from them west of Pangkor island.

### ***Baiting the law***

Illegal commercial fishing is rampant along the Tonle Sap and the Mekong River in **Cambodia**. A senior advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has recently warned that this is threatening the survival of several species vital to Cambodia's economy.

In some protected areas, fishermen use illegal measures like poison, electricity and even explosives to catch fish.

The government restricts commercial fishing in certain areas, between July and November, to ensure that the fish reproductive cycle is not disrupted.

If illegal fishing continues for five more years, several indigenous species, including the blackfish, will disappear.

But the government finds it difficult to crack down on illegal fishing because the fishermen are backed up by armed guards.