

## In the News/ Spain

### Silent Slaves

*Fishermen's wives associations in Spain have initiated a campaign to improve the working and living conditions of sea-going fishermen*

**An article by L.C. Saavedra in *Voz de Galicia*, Spain, translated by Brian O'Riordan.**

Several organizations have initiated a campaign to obtain the 500,000 signatures needed for establishing a Common Law. Several associations of seafarer's wives from all over Spain will send a proposal to the Congress of Deputies for establishing, as Common Law, a norm for regulating the activity of sea-going fishermen. They will continue to collect the half million signatures needed until 30 November 2002.

Till today, there is no legal way for fishermen to improve their on-board working and living conditions through the Constitution. An initiative such as this to establish a Common Law requires half a million signatures for it to be taken up by the Congress, and for it to be treated as a binding norm within the Spanish legal system. The authors of this proposal are several associations of fishermen's wives from the autonomous communities of Galicia, Basque country, Catalonia, Andalucia and possibly, even from the Canary Islands communities.

The main idea of such a law is that the legal system can be used to increase the rest period on shore as a function of the time worked at sea. It is proposed that, initially, for every four months worked, two months of rest be provided. The main sticking point that must be solved is who will pay for this. To start with, it is proposed that the government approaches the European Social Fund to pay for part of this rest period, and that the rest be shared by boatowners and the administration.

Josefa Soto and Cristina de Castro, respectively the President of Rosa dos Ventos and the national fisheries delegate of the Apostolate of the Sea, spoke in Vigo about the task facing working society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to humanize. They declared that "seafaring fishermen are this century's new and silent slaves".

In the opinion of Soto and de Castro, the proposal will not only contribute to improving life of the workers but the rest periods will also, at the same time, reduce

fishing effort as the current working regime, more than 10 hours daily, is a factor that favours overfishing. Josefa Soto, and Cristina de Castro are carrying out the awareness raising campaign across the length and breadth of the country in order to obtain the half million signatures needed. All kinds of Spanish institutions will be contacted, including the official representatives in Madrid and Europe. The promoters hope that the signatures can be presented before 30 November, a date that will coincide with a Congress they are organizing in Vigo.