

Latin America/ Chile

From Challenge to Opportunity

Pisagua achieved notoriety as a prison, torture and death camp during the brutal Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990). Today fishermen's wives want to give Pisagua another reputation, as a lovely tourist destination boasting tasty seafood

This piece is translated by Brian O'Riordan from an article by Daniela Olivares that appeared in *La Caleta*, Edición 8, No 1. Marzo 2007 (http://www.conapach.cl/revista/la_caleta_8_01.pdf)

On 21 February 2007, a group of 21 women connected with artisanal fishing in the Commune of Huará in Chile's Tarapacá Region I, incorporated themselves into the artisanal fishery by setting up the Co-operative of Women Entrepreneurs and Harvesters of *Caleta Pisagua*, Comuepi. Their aim is to improve the commercialization of seafood produced by fishermen from the *caleta*.

The specific objectives of the co-operative are to engage in the production, purchase, sale, distribution and processing of goods and products, to provide services related to the harvesting of seafood, the export of products and services, and activities that contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of those who carry them out.

According to Solange Alvarez, a member of the co-operative, the idea arose from the needs expressed by several wives of the divers and fishermen of the No.1 Syndicate in Pisagua. They wanted to form an association to jointly commercialize the fishery products caught by the fishermen. Until then each one had bought and sold sea urchin (*erizos*) and abalone (*locos*) on an individual basis in different parts of the region, including Huará, Pozo, Almonte, Iquique and even in the metropolitan region of Santiago.

"We realized that we were heading nowhere; having to travel here and there from this very isolated place meant that each of us was spending a lot of money. On the other hand, organized and united, we can



apply for funding and projects to improve the way our products are presented," Solange explained. "At the moment, we are hoping to be granted some seed capital that will enable us to arrange a processing area where we can bottle and serve our products, and so add value and increase our incomes."

Pisagua has wide notoriety in the region's collective memory. Over three presidential periods, it was used as a detention and torture centre. But it was the discovery of human remains there during the decade of the 1990s that shed light on the brutality of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Through its association with this dark period of the country's history, the port was inevitably stigmatized.

The co-operative now has enthusiastic plans to blot out this stain and promote Pisagua as a destination for bountiful seafood. The co-operative plans to use one of their member's houses to welcome tourists and offer them tastings of the fishermen's daily catch.

"In this way, through the joint work that we are planning with the artisanal fishermen, we hope to stimulate tourism, so that Pisagua is not just known for past political events", emphasizes Solange.

These wives and mothers from the artisanal fishery hope that their work will allow them to give Pisagua another face, one that is more inviting for people to get to know the *caleta*. Over time, they believe, the fishermen, and especially their sons, will progress along with the community.

The women say: “We don’t want our sons to stay in Iquique when they go to study there. We want them to return as professionals and to join us in our efforts to bring development and education to both our commune and our *caleta*”.

Brian can be contacted at briano@scarlet.be