

South America/ Ecuador

Banning the Beach Seine

A group of women has decided to abandon the ecologically-hazardous practice of beach seine fishery, opting instead for small enterprise activities supported by fishery authorities

This article has been compiled by Brian O’Riordan using information from several sources

In Ecuador, *chumumo* or Regan’s anchovy (*anchoa argentivittata*) is a fish found in nearshore waters. Sold for artisanal fishmeal processing, it provides a vital source of income for many fisherwomen. The beach seine fishery for *chumumo* in turn supplies raw material to *pamperas* (artisanal fishmeal businesses), many of which operate clandestinely. In Manta, Montecristi and Jaramijó, there are reportedly 17 such *pamperas*—small plots of wasteland used for drying the ingredients used in artisanal fishmeal production. This occupation is thus a source of traditional livelihood to many people from the fishing community.

However, beach seine fishery also has its dangers. There are violent conflicts with the tuna pole-and-line vessels that use these shoals as bait. This occupation is also bad for the marine ecology, as overfishing of *chumumo* damages the biomass of a species that supports other fish populations out at sea. *Chumumo* fishing is, therefore, a banned activity in Ecuador. However, economic needs force many fishers to break the law.

Recently, as part of a Government programme to phase out illegal small-meshed nets used in *chumumo* fishing, an incentive scheme was introduced to buy out the owners of these gears.

“*Chinchorro de playa* (beach seining) is an environmentally destructive fishing practice and we hope to eliminate its use in coastal areas by making agreements with the users”, says Jimmy Martinez, the local Director of Fisheries. According to Martinez, the problem has social dimensions as each beach seine provides incomes for between eight and 15 people.

Solanda Bermello, who for nearly a decade has been catching fish from the beaches of Los Esteros, Jaramijo and San Mateo, says that she and her companions

are abandoning their nets in exchange for money that the Fisheries Resources Subsecretary is providing for undertaking alternative businesses. According to the Fisheries Resources Subsecretary, Guillermo Moran, every illegal gear handed in will be met with US \$1000 in compensation, to help manufacture new equipment approved by Subsecretariat technicians. The Government also undertakes to provide fishers with training that will improve their understanding of business management and to obtain low interest credit through Banco de Fomento—a development bank.

On 5 May 2007, Solanda Bermello on behalf of ten artisanal fishers from Jaramijó, and Hermenegildo Santana and Gloria Vera Marín on behalf of eleven fishers from Manta, signed the agreement. Gabriela Cruz, President of Ecuador’s National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives (FENACOPEC), was the witness of honour.



However, not all from the fishing community are supportive of the Government programme. Says Luz María Delgado, aged 60, from Jaramijó, “This is our daily bread; the fishery belongs to the women; it is what sustains us; it’s all we have; it is how our parents taught us to survive”.

The women also feel that the compensation is barely enough to cover the costs of starting a new business activity. They feel, therefore, that the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries must provide ongoing assistance so that the activities they take up prosper.

Ecuador has a notorious reputation for failing to enforce environmental protection regulations. Examples of Ecuador's poor environmental record include providing concessions to transnational mining companies in the south of the country, the felling of forests and mangrove areas with impunity, external debt trade offs for carbon emissions, the privatization of water rights in urban areas and the ruthless exploitation of petrol in the Amazon basin. But, as a recent bill to regulate the capture of sharks and the illegal trade of shark fins shows, President Correa is now threatening to get tough.

Whether attempts to curb destructive fishing practices are successful remains to be seen. But, it is certainly important that such conservation initiatives involve the stakeholders—in this case, the women of the community—and that alternative livelihood is guaranteed.

Sources: <http://www.expreso.ec/html/economia6.asp> - Compensación por los artes de pesca: Pescadores Recibirán 1.000 dólares; La Hora: <http://www.lahora.com.ec/frontEnd/main.php?idSeccion=570758>: Pescadores de orilla firman acta para regular captura; El Diario - <http://www.eldiario.com.ec/noticias-manabi-ecuador/55913>: Mujeres cambian redes por negocios alternativos

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