

“Through struggle we achieve our objectives!”

This article is based on an interview with Natalia Laiño Lojo, General Secretary of the Galician Association of Women and Men Shellfishers (AGAMAR) conducted by Patricio Igor Melillanca (patricio@ecoceanos.cl), Ecoceanos, Chile

Translated from Spanish by **Brian O’Riordan** (briano@scarlet.be), Secretary, ICSF Belgium Office

“Shellfish gathering in Galicia generates work for around 5,000 women and 4,000 men gatherers. What is produced must pass through the *lonja* (auction). Only the specific quantities of particular species approved through agreements established between *cofradia* (see interview) and the regional administration under the *junta* can be extracted. Through this, we avoid saturating the market and are able to conserve resources, select for quality and control prices.”

Talking about shellfish gathering in Galicia is Natalia Laiño, General Secretary of the Galician Association of Women and Men Shellfishers (AGAMAR). Shellfish gathering is a traditional activity in Galicia. Says Natalia: “What we did in recent years was to get social recognition for them as workers.”

Shellfish gathering used to be a supplementary activity involving the family unit. When women and their children had some spare time, they would go to the sea to gather small amounts of shellfish for sale in the small regular markets or to a small trader in the area at that time.

Natalia represented Galicia’s shellfish workers in the recently-concluded Global

Conference on Small-scale Fisheries in Bangkok (4SSF). According to her, there is a great deal of difference in the way that rights are dealt within Galicia and what was discussed at the Conference. “In Galicia, there is a need for basic rights including the right to livelihood, right to obtain work and health insurance and the right to information for consumers.” However, some issues, for example, the fight against pollution, are common.

Galician beaches are threatened by pollution from housing. Says Natalia: “At one time the Galician *junta* paid women workers to clean up the beaches, during which time they did not extract shellfish. But we want to eliminate pollution, because the mainstay for women shellfishers is not subsidies for cleaning up the beaches, but the produce of the sea.”

What other issues affect shellfish gatherers? Says Natalia: “We are also interested to have a debate on trade issues, about how extraction can be regulated and managed in ways that allow us to guarantee conservation of resources in the water, and also allows for the possibility of regulating the market. And we are committed to informing people that in Galicia the products extracted are artisanal and healthy. Our message is that there are different struggles, and we can say that through struggle, we achieve our objectives.”