



Mc Guinness

International Coalition of Fisheries Associations

UNICPOLOS

Talking Points

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An Overview

The International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA) is a coalition of national fisheries associations from major fishing nations. The members include: Australia, Canada, the Federation of ASEAN nations, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. ICFA members advocate for the long-term sustainable use of living marine resources for the benefit of global food security and prosperity. ICFA members are deeply committed to science-based and fully participatory fishery conservation and management processes that engage the affected stakeholders.

ICFA developed very much in response to the important and ambitious work of the FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI). There was a need for a stakeholders coalition to work within COFI regarding the development of a Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Compliance Agreement, the International Plans of Action on IUU Fishing, Capacity, Seabirds, and Sharks, and the International Guidelines for the Eco-labeling of Fish and Fishery Products. Important work is continuing in COFI on endangered species, deep sea fisheries, marine protected areas, and, possibly, with respect to the performance of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations. As such, ICFA is committed to our involvement and the work of COFI.

However, in recent years other UN fora such as the General Assembly, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and these Informal Consultations on Oceans and the Law of the Sea have developed discussions on fisheries and the management of fisheries. As such, ICFA is delighted to participate in this sixth meeting of this group. We thank the governments of Canada and Japan for nominating ICFA to participate on the panel regarding fisheries and their contribution to sustainable development.

Who's Fishing?

Governments don't fish; fishermen and companies fish. Capital is mobile and moves to where profit can be made. Our stakeholders are responsible fishing companies, who are challenged on a daily basis by competition from unscrupulous operators operating under the protective shields of Flags of Non-compliance. Flags of Non Compliance enable irresponsible fishing, operating with cost structures that responsible fishing companies cannot hope to compete, and thus, undermining the sustainability of many fisheries.

Partnership Spirit

Let me emphasize. The issue is irresponsible fishing, not the fishing gear. No gear type is inherently destructive. From experience, we know that all gear types

can have negative impacts. We need to identify where the challenges to fisheries sustainability are occurring and bring together responsible governments, responsible industry organizations, and responsible environmental groups in a partnership spirit, not a confrontational spirit, to jointly develop and implement strategies to solve the problem.

Responsible fishing sectors are taking action. The tuna long line industry has taken steps to reduce capacity, introducing Tori poles to reduce seabird by-catch, and circle hooks to reduce sea turtle by-catch. Bottom trawling groundfish and shrimp industries have adopted special grids to avoid and eliminate by-catches. The scallop sector maps the ocean floor of commercial interest allowing it to emerge into a cultivated, tightly controlled harvest. In fact, most R&D expenditures by responsible fleet sectors now are no longer targeted to enhance efficiency of the harvest but to address environmental issues and reduce the footprint of fishing on the environment.

Good Governance

We need good governance with an effective regulatory environment applied to all and a fisheries management approach that values and protects resource access rights in return for compliance with regulatory obligations. Such a regime and attitude engenders a stewardship approach to the resource and is the foundation for sustainable fisheries.

Fisheries Sustainability

The biggest threat to fisheries sustainability is overcapacity. As a recent FAO technical paper (Ward, Kirkley, Metzger, Pascoe) found "overcapacity in fisheries develops primarily as a consequence of the absence of clearly defined property rights and the way in which fishermen and fishing companies react to the influences or incentives that they face under such conditions." Incentive blocking measures such as limited entry, buyback programs, gear and vessel restrictions, TACs, catch limits, and effort restrictions do not prevent the formation of overcapacity. Indeed, these controls actually create long run incentives to increase rather than decrease capacity. Ward et al found that incentive blocking programs are only effective in reducing capacity in the short term.

Cooperative Behavior

On the other hand, incentive adjusting approaches based on user rights transform the fish stocks in question into a shared asset that inspires and warrants cooperative behavior to conserve and enhance the value of the asset. Thus, sustainability and commercial concerns are aligned and even reinforce each other.

Avoid Oversimplification

I believe it is Santayana to whom we owe the observation that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it. He could have been thinking of the fisheries. Periodic crises in the fisheries, their severity increasing as harvesting technology becomes more sophisticated are a feature of all developed fisheries. The problem is often boiled down to the simple statement that there are too many

fishermen chasing too few fish. While true, this oversimplification ignores the circumstances under which the chase is pursued.

Common-Property Nature

Notwithstanding all the variables which contribute to periodic booms and busts in fisheries including natural fluctuations in stock abundance, market instability, cost increases, technical advances and a variety of others which, when acting in concert can produce catastrophic downturns. The single overwhelming feature which undermines attempts to produce prosperity, stability, and sustainability in the fisheries is the common-property nature of exploitation of the resource.

Committed to Sustainability

ICFA and its member associations are committed to sustainability. Not only is it the right course of direction but it is also good for business. Fish may be the most widely traded food commodity in the world, but the export market is concentrated – USA, Japan, and the European Union. Seafood is generally a high priced item and competes with beef, pork, poultry, and pasta for “stomach share” in these markets. In the USA, particularly, we are trying to change imbedded eating habits so that seafood consumption rises from the 15-16 lb/person range to the 20+lb/person range. Increasing consumer concerns about the sustainability of the world’s fishery resources undermines our efforts to reach these higher levels of consumption. We need to work together to improve the image of fisheries management and take difficult steps to address policies, actions, and attitudes that undermine the sustainability of world fishery resources.

Another important point is the contribution of fisheries to the sustainable development of developing countries. Fisheries, including large scale fisheries, provide a two-fold purpose for developing countries. It helps them meet their food security needs and need for fish protein and provides necessary foreign exchange earnings by trading fish products internationally.

Implementation

We have had a decade of developing a wide range of international fisheries management instruments. We now need a decade of committed implementation of these instruments. Within nations, we need fisheries managers committed to managing the fisheries on a sustainable basis and expanding the use of management regimes that engender stewardship and provide fishermen and fishing companies with secure access rights. On the high seas, we need to modernize the RFMOs to rapidly adopt the international instruments and to gain the powers necessary to be effective fishery managers. Most RFMOs were children of the 1970s. We need to develop a consensus model of what the essential fisheries management tools are that a model RFMO should have. The UN Fish Agreement placed considerable responsibility on RFMOs to deliver sustainable fisheries management. There is now a need to develop a consensus of what powers and tools a RFMO should have in order to be able to meet the task. And, finally, we need to plug the gaps in RFMO global coverage.