

Fisheries management

Gang up to reap benefits

Only greater interaction among the protagonists involved in the fisheries sector will produce results

Tell them: they forget
Show them: they remember
Explain to them: they understand
—Chinese proverb

To dwell on a personal note, during my time of active service at sea, I operated as aggressively and effectively as the rest of the competition. However, I realized, at a very early age, that the exploitation of marine resources had limitations, and if this fact did not receive due consideration and regard, problems would inevitably develop. This observation led to prudent fish capturing methods and techniques. As they say, "There is none so pure as the converted".

In an industry like fisheries, which is burdened with many fundamental and contentious issues, several trouble spots flare up periodically around the world.

Think of these: fisheries management and effort control; environmental and ecological problems; technical conservation strategies; changing circumstances and conditions resulting from technological development. These are but a few of the burning issues facing the modern fishing industry.

Let us take a look at the fisheries management aspect of the industry, before delving into the practicalities of fishing. For some years now, I have firmly believed that the key to success in fisheries administration lies in the co-operation and collaboration of the main players concerned, that is, the scientist, the politician and the fishery personnel. Working together, accepting and understanding the needs of one another, would bring about more solutions than all the unilateral and bilateral decisions and legislation produced so far.

Several countries around the world are now enjoying successful fishery programmes as a result of adopting and introducing viable policies and strategies. Despite these examples of successful progress, however, many more areas continue to languish in outdated practices and management methods. Quite apart from failing to exploit renewable marine resources to their full potential, these outdated methods are actually counter-productive to the long-term welfare and stability of the industry, at all levels.

The causes and reasoning behind these success stories and the less successful operations in commercial sea fishing are many and varied, and equally well documented by commentators from all over the world. There are, nevertheless, a few common denominators of success: effort, resources and *modus operandi*. Some do it methodically and properly, while others carry out their business with rather less of planning and programming, and more of gusto, in order to target results and rewards. These only lead to dwindling resources and crumbling commercial infrastructures.

Human factor

One common element is, of course, the human factor. There is no shortage of effort from practitioners in fishing. It is just unfortunate that energies are not concentrated to reach the most desirable goal: the sustainable development of the resources available.

Where two factors are involved, as is the case in fishing, it makes fairly obvious sense to implement any desirable change by targeting the factor which is capable of being influenced. In the case of fishing, where we have no control or influence over the marine resources, it is evident

that some pressure should be brought to bear on the human factor.

At first sight, this suggestion appears to say nothing new. It is exactly what fisheries legislators have been trying to do for years that is, attempting, rather desperately in some cases, to get the fishermen to change their traditional methods and practices. The main obstacle to this approach is that it is usually only the fishermen who since they are noted for their flexibility and resilience are asked to make changes, often involving substantial sacrifices.

A clear look at the problems of fisheries management makes it apparent that the implementation of change would be more successful if there were greater interaction among the protagonists involved. Gone are the days when fishermen were the sole influence in fishing. Modern methods and technology have made it necessary to introduce a controlled and programmed fishery infrastructure.

Fishermen have been joined in the field by the scientist and the politician. Both these entities must receive their rightful recognition, in order to bring about integrated fishing activity in an arena involving multinational interests. There can be benefits for the fishermen who have attentive ears and are willing to respond meaningfully to changing circumstances and conditions.

There are signs from various parts of the world that this element of closer interaction has already been recognized and appreciated. Canada and Norway are two prime examples. There are others.

In Canada, Brian Tobin, former Fisheries Minister, has already been active to bring about closer relationships between the main players in the field. Norway, apparently, is also increasing and strengthening links among fishermen, scientists and legislators. This makes sense. To have regular all-party talks would bring about a greater mutual understanding of the difficulties fishing industries are periodically faced with.

The recent outcome from the Law of the Sea Convention and the recommended FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible

Fisheries are steps in the right direction. However, it must be recognized that these are only recommendations, and remain some way short of giving power and true teeth to the suggested proposals.

There is enough evidence to indicate how difficult it is, at national levels, to enforce legislation in a fragmented industry deployed across the oceans of the world. In addition, there is the human factor to contend with. The old element, which has been so impossible to control and influence in the past, remains on the sidelines and ready to erupt into unrest, when resources become scarce, as has been experienced in the past.

Even the introduction of the all-party approach to negotiations will only be successful if such talks and proposals are indeed bona fide. Meetings between the main people involved can only produce the right results if each sector receives its rightful role in the negotiations.

It would serve no useful purpose if the principal players got together and after discussing and debating the key issues, everyone went home and 'did their own thing', carrying on operations as if no agreement had been reached.

Monitoring needed

Any agreements reached by these 'councils of principals' would necessarily require to be monitored and properly implemented, if any progress is to be achieved towards the ultimate goal of sustainable development of renewable marine resources.

This piece is by John C. Gowie of Aberdeen, Scotland, who has spent a working life involved in various fishing activities, including a stint as a fisheries journalist