

News Round-up

CITES strikes

Last month the 12th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) decided to protect mahogany and the entire genus of the seahorse, as well as regulate the trade of basking and whale sharks. The listing of seahorse on Appendix II of CITES enters into effect on 15 May 2004.

Opponents to the listing, led by Japan, claimed there was not enough scientific evidence to justify the proposal. In the committee, the measure fell two votes short of the two-thirds majority required for listing on Appendix II. In the plenary session,

however, the whale shark listing was approved 81 for and 37 against, and the basking shark listing approved with 82 for and 36 against.

Whale and basking sharks are the

world's two largest fish species, and both are hunted for their meat and fins. The fins of whale sharks fetch high prices in Asia, with a single fin reported to have sold for \$15,000 in 1999. Both species are also highly migratory and often caught and killed accidentally as by-catch.

Reserve bill

In New Zealand, a new Marine Reserves Bill will allow marine reserves to be established anywhere within the 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone.

Currently, they can only be declared within New Zealand's 12-nautical mile territorial waters.

Fishing is not allowed in marine reserves but the bill says other activities such as approved scientific research is allowed.

According to critics, the bill does not sufficiently balance rights against views.

They point to the Wellington South Coast Marine Reserve as an example of resources being locked up, which runs counter to the

spirit of sustainable development and customary fishing rights.

Lights off

Tension is rife in the fishing industry of Ghana following the government's directives for the arrest of vessels using lighting to attract fish into fishing nets.

At least 500 wooden vessels belonging to the Ghana Inshore Fisheries Association, whose members are using this method, have remained moored at the ports and jetties along the country's coast over the past week, for fear of being arrested by the navy at sea. While the government is defending its stand to halt the method, which is described as dangerous and likely to deplete fish stocks, especially of juvenile fish, the fishermen say that it is a way of throwing them out of business.

No dole

The president of Brazil has vetoed a

bill to give unemployment benefits for fishermen who are out of work during temporary fishing bans, arguing that it goes against public interest and contradicts the country's Constitution.

According to *Diario Oficial de La Unión*, the executive said professional fishermen are already protected by unemployment insurance.

The Ministry of Economy also said there was no budget provision to cover this type of subsidy, and pointed out that in any case it would be contrary to the Fiscal Responsibility Law.

Fishermen said the decision was "absurd." Around 11,000 fishermen are covered by unemployment insurance and union leaders hoped the new law would achieve a 40 per cent increase in the number of beneficiaries by extending it to another 4,400 workers.

Subsidies

Argentina, Chile and Peru are adding their weight to the Friends of Fish campaign to stamp out fishing subsidies.

The Friends of Fish group, including Norway, Iceland and

New Zealand, has been pushing for subsidies to be classified according to detailed inventories.

It wants a study on the impact of the different support schemes to determine which of them violate multilateral commerce rules.

Meanwhile, Argentina, Chile and Peru have voiced their concerns at the World Trade Organization.

Various fishing industry organizations represented their members at a meeting with government officials.

The fishing companies say they pay various fees and taxes, but don't receive any subsidies on their exports, while, in other countries, companies that perform the same activities, and import products caught in Argentine waters, do get subsidies.

Child labour

Free the Fishing Boys, a US-funded programme, which aims to assist and return to their families more than 1,200 children trafficked for forced labour in the Central and Volta regions of Ghana, is making good progress, according to the International

Organization for Migration (IOM).

To date, IOM staff in Yeji and Atebubu

districts of Brong Ahafo region have successfully registered 814 children who are currently employed under slave-like conditions in numerous fishing communities established along the shores and on islands scattered on Lake Volta.

Lake help

The European Union (EU) has approved a 29.9 mn euro programme to implement fisheries management measures on Lake Victoria.

The programme, to be implemented over a 5-year period (2003-2007), is a concrete expression of support for the Fisheries Management Plan, which aims to maintain and sustain fish resources in the lake.

In particular, the programme will help the three East African countries of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania to monitor catches and enforce measures

to counteract illegal fishing.

Caught poaching

Last month, the authorities of Mozambique seized four foreign industrial fishing vessels for illegally fishing for prawns in Mozambican waters, according to the independent newspaper, *Mediafax*.

The trawlers were operating in the country's richest prawn fishery, the Sofala Bank, off the central Mozambican coast, during the period of the year when all prawn fishing is banned, in

order to allow the crustaceans to breed.

The four ships, which are currently being held in the port of Quelimane, were flying under the Thai flag, according to a source in the fishing industry cited by the paper.

Quota curbs

The Agriculture Ministry of Malaysia is considering setting a quota on fishing output and reducing the number of fishing licences to revive the country's fisheries resources to a more sustainable level.

Turtle tattle

The Central Empowered Committee (CEC), constituted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, of India, to look into the death of Olive Ridley sea turtles along the Orissa coast, has directed the State Government to establish permanent camps and boat stations in the next few months for the protection of the endangered species.

The Committee has suggested that the officers of the Coastguard at Paradeep be notified as Authorised Officers under the Orissa Marine Fishing Regulation Act to empower them to seize and impound trawlers operating in the restricted zone where the sea turtles nest.

The CEC wants the Fisheries Department to suspend the licences of boats not using turtle excluder devices (TEDS).

It has also recommended that all gill-net boats operating within 5 km of the nesting sites should be banned for the next three months.