

Work Together for Community-based Fisheries

Rather than “bash” the Marine Stewardship Council, it would be better to work with it to help small-scale fishing communities prosper

The previous issue of *SAMUDRA Report* (No. 51, November 2008) contains an article entitled “Certifying the Certifiers” that makes the same argument we have heard for years: that ecolabelling initiatives somehow will disenfranchise small-scale fishermen. The author claims that the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) ecolabel will only “maintain the status quo of industrial fisheries”.

Tell that to the hundreds of small-scale fishermen in Mexico and elsewhere who already benefit from certification of their fisheries under the MSC’s programme. For example, the MSC label is helping community-based spiny lobster fishermen from Puerto Abreojos on Mexico’s Baja Peninsula open new markets and get more money for their product. Their experience has encouraged other small-scale fishermen on Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula likewise to seek certification of their lobster fishery in the Sian Ka’an and Banco Chinchorro Biosphere Reserves. More than 70 per cent of the spiny lobster caught in Mexican fisheries is exported to the United States and Europe, where ecolabels are increasingly sought by corporate seafood buyers, chefs and consumers alike.

Today, community-based fishermen in Mexico are getting more for their catch, and winning powerful support for better management of their fisheries through their participation in the MSC’s programme.

When the MSC was founded in the mid-1990s, Sebastian Mathew of ICSF and I debated at length whether

ecolabelling would ever help small-scale fishermen. Our exchange of letters was published in *SAMUDRA Report* (reproduced in “Fish Stakes”, *SAMUDRA Dossier*, 1998, available at http://icsf.net/icsf2006/uploads/publications/dossier/pdf/english/issue_56/ALL.pdf). In those days, neither of us had much actual experience on which to base our assertions. Today, we know a lot more. In the intervening years, the MSC has gone to great lengths to assure

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In fact, a fishing community in northern Brazil once asked to have their fishery assessed under the MSC’s standards, knowing they wouldn’t pass muster. The fishermen then used the results of that pre-assessment to lobby their government to improve its management of the fishery so it could qualify for certification and access to new markets.

Small-scale fisheries

Based on that and other experiences helping small-scale fisheries, the MSC’s Technical Advisory Board launched an effort to help certifiers determine how best to assess fisheries for which few

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MARINE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL



A fisherman in Baja, California, with his catch of spiny lobster. Ecolabelling schemes can help small-scale fishing communities prosper

38

data are available. The Sustainable Fisheries Fund, based in Sacramento, California, was set up to help small-scale fisheries defray the cost of assessment. Over the years, the MSC and its supporters have demonstrated that they not only care about small-scale fisheries and the communities they support, but are willing to help them qualify for certification.

I have great respect for ICSF and its mission. But to continue its tradition of “MSC bashing” based on vague, inaccurate assertions and tired rhetoric seems counterproductive. It seems to me that your constituents would be better served by working with the MSC to ensure that it does everything possible to help small-scale fishing communities prosper and foster more effective management of their fisheries. 3

For morewww.msc.org**Marine Stewardship Council**<http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/oa/>**Monterey Bay Aquarium**