



IWMC World Conservation Trust



MANAGING FISHERIES AND THE ROLE OF CITES

INTRODUCTION

A perennial issue facing mankind is how to best utilize the world's natural resources. With aquatic foods providing essential nutrition for three billion people, and half of the animal protein and minerals for an estimated 400 million people, it is clearly vital that we succeed in conserving marine species at reasonable levels.

At the same time, for many people fisheries is about more than even food. Over 500 million people depend – directly or indirectly – on fisheries and aquaculture for their economic well-being.

We also need to carefully consider important environmental factors such as the state of oceans and waterways.

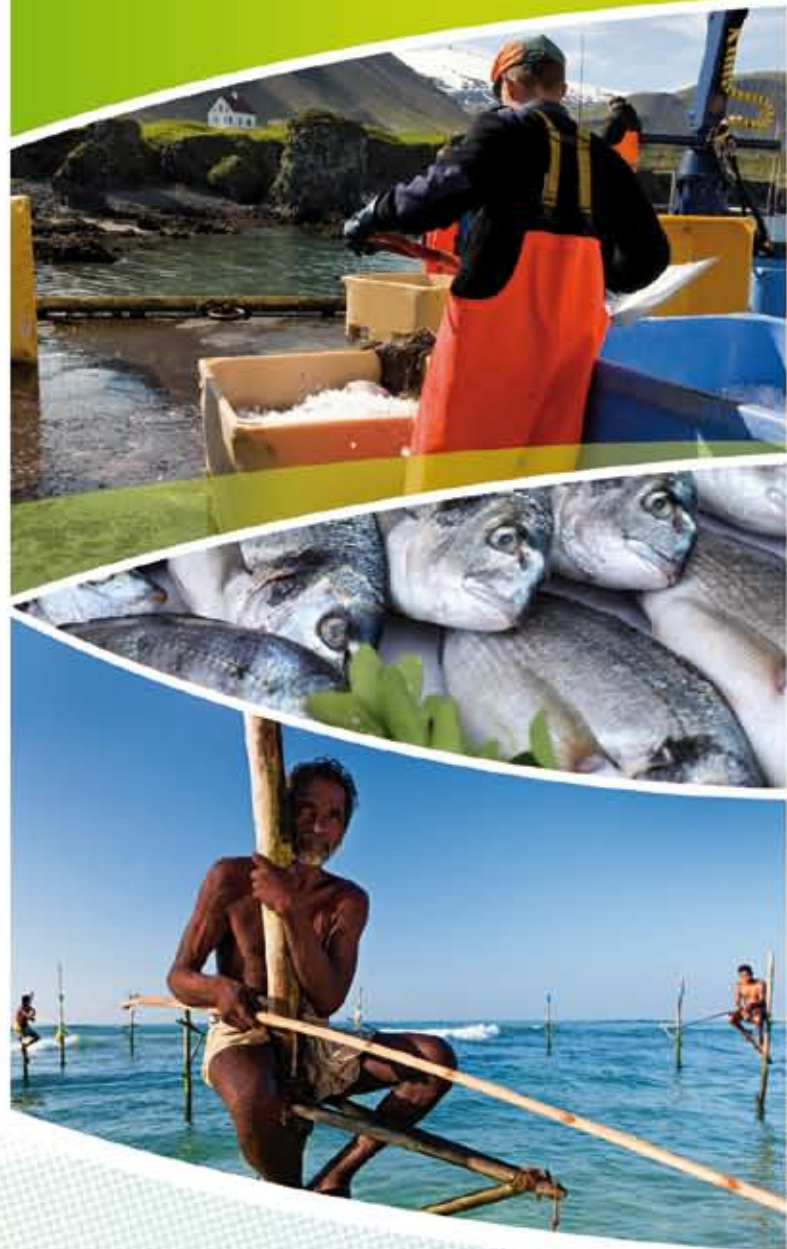
All of this makes fisheries an enormously complex issue. So how should fisheries be organized?

A WEB OF COMPLEXITY

A mix of different circumstances impact fisheries around the globe. Cultures and traditions are different from country to country and even within countries; standards of living vary; populations can be large or small; governance may be centralized or decentralized; the production of other foods may be extensive or limited; and the amount of trade in fish products may fluctuate.

In short, a broad range of political, economic and environmental factors determine how the fishery sector operates in different countries and, by extension, around the world.

As the principal international body that deals with fisheries, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) plays a key role in global governance issues. Other international, regional, national and local organizations also play important roles.



While CITES was not originally drafted with fish species in mind, it has listed a limited number of species in its appendices since it was first established.

As officials from around the world try to plot a way forward for fisheries, it is important to recognize that different management solutions apply to different sets of circumstances. If CITES – or any other international instrument – is not able to respond effectively in ways that improve the status of particular fish stocks, this does not mean that nothing should be done. It simply means that the right approach must be found.

THE FISHERMAN'S CHALLENGE

While numerous international bodies oversee many facets of our world, working people often find themselves overlooked. Nowhere is this more true than with fisheries, where millions of people today face two fundamental challenges to their livelihoods.

One is the impact of over-fishing, which occurs when fish resources are depleted at greater quantities than can be sustained. Over-exploitation of fisheries is not in the long-term interest of the fisheries sector because reduced catches mean fewer jobs, lower revenues and a general loss of well-being.

The second threat is that of over-regulation. If unjustified limits are placed on catches, or if rules on fishing practices are made too onerous, fishermen will be unable to sustain their activities. The end result for fishermen is the same: reduced catches, fewer jobs and lower revenues – amounting to a forced or imposed loss of well-being.

The fisheries sector needs assistance from the international community on both these counts. Fisheries must be properly and fairly managed to ensure that it is carried out in an orderly manner. At the same time, international, regional and national regulators need to base their decisions on sound science and with a full appreciation of local factors, so that fishermen are not carelessly disadvantaged.

This means that a balance must be found where nations work together on rules and regulations for fisheries. By designing and implementing national and regional management plans, officials can help to ensure optimal levels of fish production whilst also sustaining stocks.



FISHERIES AND LIVELIHOODS

From the beginning of human existence, fisheries has played a vital role in supplying our basic need for food. Today, it not only helps to provide us with essential nutrients, it also is an important component in the structure and welfare of many different societies and cultures around the world, especially those with indigenous peoples and fragile economies.

For many western consumers, fisheries means a visit to a supermarket chain or a restaurant. But in many parts of the world fisheries plays a key role in ensuring sustainable livelihoods.

Much of the world's fishery activity is highly localized and is characterized by small-scale operators. Almost ninety per cent of the world's 4.3 million fishing vessels operate within twelve miles of the coastline. Less than two per cent of fishing vessels are industrial fishers.

The fisheries sector provides around 55 million jobs – roughly the equivalent of the entire population of the United Kingdom or France. According to the FAO, when ancillary activities such as processing and packaging are included, together with dependents, the livelihoods of 10-12 per cent of the world's population depends on fisheries.

As a result, any significant change in the structure of fishing activities can have a devastating impact on millions of lives. A recent study showed how artisanal fishermen in Tanzania rely on fisheries for nutrition, employment and income. This situation is repeated all over the world, making fishermen vital assets in the struggle to provide food security and fight poverty.

Any measures to limit fisheries must be seen within the context of food production and human welfare. Fish should not be over-exploited precisely because it is important to maintain a reliable supply of inexpensive food.

With few other economic opportunities existing for impoverished communities, limits on fisheries – whether they arise from regulation or from over-fishing – can have a devastating impact.



ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND TRADE

Fish products are among the most widely-traded foods, with more than 37 per cent by volume of world production traded internationally, according to the FAO. Developing countries account for 55 per cent of world fish exports and, in total, the global fish trade was worth US\$ 109 billion in 2010.

Aquaculture is the fastest-growing food sector, with an annual growth rate 8.8%. In 2010, aquaculture produced 59.9 million tonnes of fish products valued at US\$119 billion. Stimulated by higher demand for fish, world fisheries and aquaculture production is projected to reach about 172 million tonnes in 2021, with most of the growth coming from aquaculture.

Estimates indicate that exports of fish and fishery products will continue to rise based on forecasts for future demand, trade liberalization, globalization of food systems and the application of technological innovations. As well as feeding more people, the growth in fisheries trade spurs economic growth and provides an important stimulus to developing economies.

MANAGEMENT OF FISHERIES

Successful fishery management in areas like Alaska – where salmon and pollock stocks are maintained at high levels and fisheries are optimized – demonstrate what can be positively achieved by a strong cooperative approach.

At a regional level, where cooperation is required between different nations, recent signs are encouraging. ICATT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) has now implemented a new management scheme that is designed to allow stocks of the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna to recover; and Mediterranean nations have established a management plan for Red Coral.

In many second and third world nations, effective management is hampered by a lack of resources to accurately estimate fish stocks, gather and record accurate fishery sector data, inspect fishing vessels, monitor catches and police over-fishing and illegal fishing. This means that bilateral support – such as that provided by Norway to the fisheries sector in Mozambique, Viet Nam and Nicaragua – is essential if we are to ensure that the best fishery management practices become more widely utilized.



CITES AND FISHERIES

With its responsibilities for trade in endangered species and its global reach, CITES has the ability to influence fishery policies and practices. However, CITES has no mandate to manage global fisheries and also lacks the competence, capacity and resources to do so. Not surprisingly, the impact of CITES listings on fisheries has not been especially successful.

One reason is that when CITES provisions are applied to marine species, implementation becomes particularly complex. The humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*) was listed in 2004 but implementation of measures to limit trade has been delayed by numerous technical and administrative issues.

This is especially troubling given the proposals for additional shark listings at CITES COP16 in 2013. The humphead wrasse should have been much easier to regulate than sharks, which are often taken as bycatch. This means that fishermen and officials in many countries could be obliged to dedicate considerable time to reporting incidental catches to comply with CITES requirements. Many nations simply lack the capability to implement and enforce such complex procedures.

CITES listings can also produce other unintended consequences. The 1994 listing of the queen conch, whilst helping the species to be managed more effectively in Jamaica, converted some bona fide fishers in other countries into poachers, creating significant local problems.

And the listing of seahorses (*Hippocampus* spp.) in 2002 has not had the intended effect in the Philippines, where a national law bans the gathering and trade of Appendix II-listed species. With local officials reportedly not enforcing an unpopular ban, seahorse gathering continues and may be increasing. New local ordinances intended to improve the sustainability of the seahorse fishery contradict national law and are themselves unenforceable.

There are numerous examples like this that illustrate some of the difficulties experienced by nations implementing CITES listings on marine species.

The problem is not with the integrity of the implementing nation but with the complexity of what is being attempted through CITES.

These types of issues – where local dynamics are not carefully analyzed and problems ensue – are recognized within CITES. The CITES Animal Committee has previously concluded that improved management rather than listings on CITES appendices is the obvious priority, and it has not changed this conclusion at recent meetings.

But if CITES continues to list commercially-exploited marine resources without having the necessary means to implement measures, the organization risks losing credibility. Moreover, dissatisfaction with the CITES process for listing marine species is likely to encourage a number of nations to enter reservations, rendering these listings ineffective even in theory.





CAN CITES HELP THE MANAGEMENT OF FISHERIES?

The coming decades are likely to see major changes in the management of global fisheries. The inadequate governance, management and practices that characterize a significant proportion of global fisheries today must be replaced by more effective and sustainable programs.

If CITES is to play a role in fisheries, it is important that a framework is agreed to ensure that listing proposals meet scientifically-based biological criteria, that the role of international trade is accurately established, that the effectiveness of existing management systems is fully evaluated, and that the impact on livelihoods is properly assessed. Moreover the practicality and workability of each proposal should be demonstrated comprehensively.

Most nations that belong to CITES also belong to the FAO and other organizations that manage marine species. So the means are already in place for nations that belong to CITES to improve the management of fisheries, without resorting to the added complication of listings. It makes little sense for CITES to impose an added layer of requirements on top of those already being implemented by these same member nations and, within each nation, by the same Department, the same Minister, the same officials.

CITES Listings do not magically provide panaceas for the recovery of marine species as some advocates like to proclaim. Instead, they should be viewed as one possible conservation vehicle within a complex set of circumstances.

Unfortunately, in many cases a listing can be an inappropriate move that only hampers effective species management. And the continued listing of marine fish species by CITES could negatively influence livelihoods in some of the poorest parts of the world, whilst producing no positive results for conservation.

SUMMARY

- The many differences between countries must be factored into any action program on fisheries: cultures, traditions, standards of living, population mix, governance, food production and the amount of trade in fish products.
- Different management solutions apply to different sets of circumstances. If CITES – or any other international instrument – is not able to respond effectively in ways that improve the status of particular fish stocks, this does not mean that nothing should be done. It simply means that the right approach must be found.
- Fisheries must be properly and fairly managed to ensure that it is carried out in an orderly manner. International, regional and national regulators need to base their decisions on sound science and with a full appreciation of local factors, so that fishermen are not carelessly disadvantaged.
- A balance must be found where nations work together on rules and regulations for fisheries. By designing and implementing national and regional management plans, officials can help to ensure optimal levels of fish production whilst also sustaining stocks.
- Any measures to limit fisheries must be seen within the context of food production and human welfare. Limits on fisheries – whether they arise from regulation or from over-fishing – can have a devastating impact on communities.
- Fisheries plays a key role in ensuring sustainable livelihoods in many parts of the world. Much of the world's fishery activity is highly localized and is characterized by small-scale operators. Almost ninety per cent of the world's 4.3 million fishing vessels fish within twelve miles of the coastline. Less than two per cent of fishing vessels are industrial fishers.
- Fishing not only helps to provide us with essential nutrients, it also is an important component in the structure and welfare of many different societies and cultures around the world, especially those with indigenous peoples and fragile economies.
- The fisheries sector provides around 55 million jobs – roughly the equivalent of the entire population of the United Kingdom or France. The livelihoods of 10-12 per cent of the world's population depends on fisheries.
- Fish products are among the most widely-traded foods. Developing countries account for 55 per cent of world fish exports. In 2010, the global fish trade was worth US\$ 109 billion.
- Nations experience difficulties implementing CITES listings on marine species because of the complexity of what is being attempted through CITES. The listing of marine fish species by CITES could negatively influence livelihoods in some of the poorest parts of the world, whilst producing no positive results for conservation. If CITES continues to list commercially-exploited marine resources without having the necessary means to implement measures, the organization risks losing credibility.



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