

# Co-management: getting States and the fishing sector to share responsibilities and dialogue on the sustainability of the sea

Fundación Lonxanet para la pesca Sostenible Team

Antonio García-Allut, Marta Cavallé, Paloma Colmenarejo, Juan Manuel Gómez-Blanco, Miriam Montero, Aida Mosquera, Sonia Tedin, Elena Vázquez-Portela

## ABSTRACT

There are many factors in fisheries that encourage a productive rationale oriented towards the overexploitation and potential collapse of fisheries resources. The market, with its fragile regulations and lack of transparency, is one of them. Centralized models, their frameworks and dynamics from within fisheries are managed, are another factor leading to the intensification of the fishing effort. Centralized management models in modern States – pushing management from the top – have led to a significant dissociation between States and civil society. This dissociation has rendered management ineffective. Centralized models, supported by powerful and expensive fishery regulatory and control systems, have been unable to prevent a productive behaviour based on a maximization strategy in the fishing sector, leading to bad practices (poaching and illegal fishing). Given this situation, how should sustainability be addressed in the management of fishery resources? Strengthening the centralized management models or turning to new models of governance? How can a fragmented artisanal fishing sector address it? This paper shows, through two case studies (the Marine Reserves for Fishery Interests “Os Miñarzos” and “Ría de Cedeira”), what the keys to a paradigm shift are, and how equally-based co-management is a fundamental tool for opening up dialogue and collaboration between States and the fishing sector.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the FAO, 85 percent of world fisheries are fully exploited, overfished or depleted<sup>1</sup>. In the region of the Mediterranean, the situation of stocks is one of serious overfishing. More specifically, 95 percent of the fish population of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea is overfished<sup>2</sup>, according to the Expert Group for Mediterranean fish stocks, part of the European Commission Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF).

There are reasons for concern about the situation of fisheries, because of both the global scale thereof and the harshness of the impact. A food crisis would be the most dramatic consequence. This deterioration, however, also affects the fishing sector itself and the social and economic fabric of regions that depend most on fishing, leading to early drop-out of the activity, no generational replacement and the consequent impoverishment of these regions and increase in migration.

<sup>1</sup> FAO. 2012. The world status of fishing and aquaculture 2012. Rome. 231 pages.

<sup>2</sup> The TAE curve if strictly monitored and enforced, days are strictly defined and directly tied to fishing mortality, and if all vessel days were fully utilized would be perfectly inelastic (i.e. vertical in shape).

Almost all countries make efforts to regulate fishing under criteria of sustainability. However, the global situation of the oceans has not improved. Only 1 percent of the world fisheries seem to recover from overfishing<sup>3</sup>. On the contrary, there is a production logic that prevails in the world scenario, making countries' efforts to reduce this trend quite useless and pushing producers to keep on increasing and intensifying fishing catches, thereby increasing bad practices (poaching and illegal fishing).

### **FACTORS THAT LEAD TO OVERFISHING**

What are the root causes of this situation? There are multiple factors in fishing that favour production logic aimed at maximising catches. The main reasons are market forces, increased competition for resources that are becoming scarcer and scarcer and centralised fishery management models.

The influence of market forces, with their fragile regulations and lack of transparency, is one of them. The market does not wish to hear about sustainability; and countries, given their growth targets, implement policies based on market incentives and consumption, which intensifies the problem.

Increased competition for resources that are becoming scarcer and scarcer is another factor that aggravates the situation. It encourages individualism, the fragmentation of the sector and makes it difficult to implement collective solutions inspired by the general interest. When this happens, equal opportunities for access to resources are shattered in favour of the most technical fleets (industrial fleets). The rights of access to resources are built on the basis of financial and technological capacity to the detriment of the less technical fleets. Furthermore, many management systems redistribute fishing rights (quotas) in an unequal and unfair way, making inequality even more pronounced and denying basic rights to people who have historically depended on fishing.

Centralised models, the architecture and dynamics fishing resources are managed with – this is the third factor that leads to the intensification of fishing. The public authorities define the regulations and propose how to run fisheries, by means of political management with assessment from scientific institutions. In the case of the Mediterranean, some authorities consult the fishing sector – mainly via the regional consulting boards – but they are consultants and their proposals are not binding. Management models in modern countries are characterised by a top-down focus, i.e. they are hierarchical and based on an expensive control system to make sure that the fishing industry complies with the rules. This system has led to a significant disassociation between governments and civil society, creating a breach in which relations between the two parties are marked by mistrust. In such a scenario real collaboration is not easy. The result is inefficient and failed management, in which there is never enough control and it becomes impossible to solve the problem – a situation in which we all lose. Countries' targets for sustainability are opposed to their targets for maximising the fishing industry.

### **THE NEED FOR A NEW MODEL OF GOVERNANCE AND FISHERY MANAGEMENT – CO-MANAGED MARINE RESERVES AS A TOOL FOR CHANGE**

Faced with this brief diagnosis, how should we take on sustainability in the management of fishery resources? By reinforcing centralised models or designing alternative models? How could a fragmented and individualist fishing sector take it on?

The Lonxanet Foundation for Sustainable Fishing<sup>4</sup> is a small civil organisation that has been accompanying local artisanal fishing communities for over 12 years in the implementation of human, economic, social and environmental projects. We believe that a new model of management and governance is both possible and necessary.

<sup>3</sup> FAO, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> [www.fundacionlonxanet.org](http://www.fundacionlonxanet.org)

The challenge is to restore trust in the fishing sector itself and between the sector and the State. In order to generate trust it is necessary to work with the actual sector and with the state on participative processes based on dialogue. In these processes it is necessary to incorporate principles of transparency, representation, participation, to build up a culture of dialogue focused on trust and joint responsibility.

The Lonxanet Foundation started up a process of this kind in 2003 in Lira, a coastal community in Galicia (Spain), made up of 61 boats and 350 fishermen. The process came to a conclusion in 2007 with the creation by decree of a marine reserve of fishing interest jointly and equally managed by the fishing sector and the State, under the name of “Os Miñarzos” (2 074 ha). In 2006, a new process was started up in the community of Cedeira (48 boats and about 126 fishermen), which culminated in 2009 with the creation of the jointly managed marine reserve of fishing interest “Ria de Cedeira” (720 ha). These initiatives encouraged us to scale up the process with a proposal to amplify the existing marine reserves. We are currently working with 12 fishing communities, 914 boats and about 2 000 fishermen.

Despite the fact that the legal set up is a marine reserve, there are two major differences in these experiences in comparison to other marine reserves in the world – the process of collective construction that led to the design thereof and the representation and functioning of the managing bodies.

#### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS AND THE METHODOLOGY TO UNDERTAKE IT**

From the methodological point of view of the design for the marine reserve, the changes made in comparison to other reserves include a modified attitude of the facilitating entity towards fishermen and the methodological focal points adopted. Throughout the process the entity has had a low and neutral profile. We adopted a bottom-up approach; we applied participative methodologies and community mediation, in an inclusive, open and flexible way, checking the legitimacy of each step we took. A systemic and holistic approach to the social situation enabled us to integrate the complexity throughout the process. Starting with a fragmented and divided fishing sector, the main challenges were to construct a common expectation for the future, encourage communication, for fishermen to build up trust in themselves (awaken collective awareness) and generate a spirit of necessary social entrepreneurship and autonomy.

In the process of creating the marine reserves, fishermen have taken part in the design and collectively defined the most suitable fishing resources management plan for sustainable fishing. Proposals for regulation were more restrictive than those of the State itself. Furthermore, they incorporated criteria of spatial management which includes no-take zones. By integrating local ecological knowledge into scientific knowledge in the management proposals, the fishermen’s vision of sustainability was incorporated and more coherent and realistic management measures were guaranteed.

The process of collective construction and transformation is slow and complicated, but it is necessary, not just to achieve consensus in the proposal but also to increase the fishing sector’s commitment to sustainability targets. In order to involve it in this process it was necessary to point out the advantages of constructing a model based on the general rather than individual interest. All this is boosting change, from a more competitive mentality to a more cooperative one. It is almost impossible for the fishing sector to consider going back to the previous scenario – it will keep on defending the new values in the future despite all the difficulties.

### CO-MANAGEMENT AS A FUNDAMENTAL TOOL FOR OPENING UP DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN STATES AND THE FISHING SECTOR

The other major difference in the marine reserves in Galicia is that their relationship with the State is more symmetrical and horizontal: it is the co-management body of the marine reserves. The co-management body is made up of representatives from the public authorities and the fishing sector in equal numbers (with a right to opinion and vote). Scientific institutions, NGOs and other entities can be incorporated as advisors.

There are four members representing the regional government (three appointed by the Fishing Department and one by the Environmental Department). There are also four representatives from the fishing sector (one appointed by the National Federation of Cofradías, another by the Provincial Federation of Cofradías and two more by the local fishing *cofradía* and the promoter). The co-management body was set up thus in order to emphasise the joint responsibility for management between the State and the fishing sector.

The main purpose of the representation of the public authorities on the co-management body is to guarantee, from the point of view of centralised management of criteria in environmental, social and economic sustainability, the general present and future interests of all Spanish citizens, whether fishermen or not. The main purpose of the representation of the fishing sector is to guarantee and defend, with criteria of environmental, social and economic sustainability, the general present and future interests of the fishing sector as opposed to individual interests, for both fishermen who fish in the reserve and those who do not, contributing proposals for improvement. Assessment from the representatives from the scientific community is also vital to evaluate and scientifically defend the management plan presented to the co-management body for its approval. NGOs take part as critical and constructive observers, procuring inclusive dialogue that helps to take decisions with greater transparency and fairness.

Co-management is a fundamental tool for opening up dialogue and collaboration between the State and the fishing sector. These management models favour dialogue and distribute responsibility mainly among fishermen and the public authorities, instead of delegating onto one sole player – the State – all responsibility in the management of common assets.

Shared responsibility has been favoured: the sector's fulfilment and acceptance of regulations has improved, as it is the fishermen themselves who propose the rules. The number of penalties has dropped significantly, as has social conflict.

Collaboration among users has been promoted (as well as among scientific organizations and NGOs) in surveillance and monitoring, resulting in more realistic and reliable data. We are even providing ways to collaborate in the financing of the management thereof (scientific follow-up, surveillance and control, etc).

Moreover, the co-management body enables more flexible, adaptive and efficient management.

### THE MAIN OBSTACLES IN JOINT FISHERY MANAGEMENT IN THE CASE OF THE OS MIÑARZOS MARINE RESERVE

There are still certain challenges to overcome in the functioning, despite the fact that it has been reasonably efficient. Neither the representatives from the public authorities nor the fishermen share the same cultural matrix. In the management body, the representatives from the authorities use a more technical language, which is not always understood by the fishermen. Language, the intrinsic position of power and a superior strategic handling of meetings are advantages associated with the representatives from the authorities. Fishermen are at a disadvantage and suffer prejudice, especially in the early stages of the MB. This asymmetric power relationship was transferred to the co-management body. The players do not see each other as equals, and in this regard the fishermen lack a strategy for negotiation.

Another significant hurdle is the lack of willingness by the representatives of the public authorities to reinforce these instruments of dialogue. They do not seem to see the perfect opportunity to build bridges between the authorities and the fishing sector. In fact, last year the regional government of Galicia has shown a deliberate lack of interest. Despite the fact that the reserve is shared with the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and the national government, the regional government has withdrawn its financing for the scientific surveillance and monitoring of the Reserve. Their reason is the economic recession. The annual cost, however, was under 20 000 euros<sup>5</sup>, a small amount if we consider the value of a marine reserve in environmental and socio-economic terms for the population that depend on these ecosystems.

Finally, there are no clear devices for establishing communication between the fishing sector and its representatives on the co-management body. There was a preliminary protocol for communication between the fishing sector and the co-management body, although it was never fully implemented. Individualism, rivalry among fishing communities and resistance to change, etc. have all contributed to this.

The most serious obstacle is the lack of a political vision among our politicians for the value of this management tool as an opportunity to change the management model when it has been internationally recognised<sup>6</sup>.

### REQUISITES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CO-MANAGEMENT

These obstacles do not invalidate the co-management model – on the contrary, they reinforce it. All these insufficiencies are reparable. The model requires learning and time to improve its efficiency. In fact, in other experiences of co-managed reserves such as the Ría de Cedeira, these problems have been minimised significantly, and consequently efficiency has improved.

It is necessary to apply an action programme aimed at reinforcing these instruments, to keep on working with fishermen to improve their communication skills with the authorities and to optimise their presence and participation in the co-management body meetings.

A skills training programme is also necessary to work with the authorities in the same direction.

These models are not very numerous but they are changing traditional management models in favour of others which recognise the role of fishers as a determining factor for the sustainability of fishing resources. Increasing control and surveillance systems with the subsequent increase in public spending does not solve the problem of overfishing and does not involve fishermen in joint responsibility.

Building bridges and links from one to the other, when the breach between politicians and society is so deep, is one of the necessary paths to solving the issue of mutual mistrust.

Shared responsibility in the management of common goods is a fundamental key to the collective achievement of sustainability. It also leads to a more articulated society. Trust building as the main driving force is the only possible way to take on global and complex problems and to build the world and a better future that we all want and need.

For further information please visit [www.fundacionlonxanet.org](http://www.fundacionlonxanet.org) or send an e-mail to [antonio.garcia.allut@fundacionlonxanet.org](mailto:antonio.garcia.allut@fundacionlonxanet.org)

<sup>5</sup> According to notification from the Lira *Cofradía*.

<sup>6</sup> <http://webtv.un.org/search/oceans-sustainable-development-dialogues-rio20/1697291323001?term=oceans>