

Pursuing Sustainability for the Brazilian Lobster, *Panulirus argus*, Fishery from the Bottom-Up

Buscando La Sustentabilidad para la Pesquería Brasileña de Langosta, *Panulirus argus*, con Iniciativas de Abajo Hacia Arriba

À la Recherche d'Une Pêche Durable de la Langouste, *Panulirus argus*, au Brésil, une Expérience de Terrain

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ABSTRACT

The Brazilian lobster (*Panulirus argus*) fishery, exploited since the 1950's, has generated annual exports ranging from US\$ 59 to 92 million, most of which is directed to the US. Approximately 15,000 artisanal fishers, many of which are 'jangadeiros', depend directly on this resource for their livelihoods; therefore the sustainability of the fishery is imperative for social development, food security, poverty alleviation and economic stability in coastal regions of northeastern Brazil. However in the past decades the landings, catch per unit effort and size of lobsters has declined precipitously despite fisheries management regulations such as limited licensing, size limits, gear restrictions and ever expanding seasonal bans, which are accompanied by fisher's unemployment compensation. Some of the problems affecting the fishery include: overcapitalization, destructive fishing (hookah, gillnets), capture of berried and juvenile individuals, impact to habitat (steel drum 'casitas'), ineffective enforcement, lack of control of origin and insufficient scientific data (biological and socio-economic) for management decisions. Various bottom-up approaches have been developed to see this trend reversed including: local participation in fisheries management, networking, outreach and education to follow the FAO Code of Responsible Fishing, certification of lobster products, MPA establishment and marketbased tools. The latest efforts are encompassed in a sustainable fisheries partnership that seeks to develop agreements with all stakeholders to implement best management practices. Although previous MSC certification failed this time certification of origin, under the Bureau Veritas "Recognition of Responsible Fishing" scheme is sought.

KEY WORDS: Lobster, Brazil, certification, sustainability, *Panulirus argus*

INTRODUCTION

Until 1985 fishing was limited to the states of Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte and Pernambuco Brazil and then expanded north to the state of Pará and south all the way to the state of Espírito Santo — 4,000 km of coast line. We catch *Panulirus argus* and *P. laeviscauda*. From 1955 to 1962 lobsters were fished using sail boats called *jangadas* and a fishing gear called *jereré*: the fishery was totally artisanal and low impact.

The US air force captain Davis Morgan Hackman moved to Fortaleza in the early 1960s and introduced traps to the lobster fishery and started exports to the US. His attempt to put engines on *jangadas* failed, but traps are still there today. Morgan led a discreet life and disappeared just like he came – in secret – but our older fishers remember him very well.

In 1962, a fleet of lobster boats from Brittany, after having overfished the coasts of France and Mauritania, decided to catch lobsters in Brazil using trawlers without even having a license. The Brazilian Navy intervened, jailed the fisher, and confiscated the boats. After some diplomatic negotiations, the friendly Brazilians issued them scientific licenses. During the negotiations the French explained that they didn't need a license since international law only prohibited fishing on the sea floor, they argued that lobsters don't walk but jump, and thus are fish. One of the Brazilians replied: "If that is so, then Kangaroos must be birds" and got a big laugh. French President Charles de Gaulle didn't find it funny when Brazil's President João Goulart cancelled the fishing licenses due to pressure from artisanal fishers and politicians, because the French continued to use illegal gear. So, de Gaulle decided to send a warship to the coast of Brazil to protect the French fishers. This all happened during *carnival*, so it took a while to mobilize the Brazilian navy to respond to the attack. But eventually they moved in between the fishers and the warship and it came to a standoff, which only ended when the French fishers decided to go back home to Brittany and bitterly complained about the lack of support by their government. This incident led to the famous statement by de Gaulle "Brazil is not a serious country".

Twenty million US\$ were invested to create a fishing industry in Brazil. Eighteen years later, when subsidies ended, industrial vessels were left rusting away on the beach, and most of the fishing companies went bankrupt. Artisanal fishers were ignored, both with the subsidies and of the management of the fishery. An industrial fleet built in one Naval Yard, which belonged to one of the exporters, ended up dominating the fishing industry over the next 40 years. It took less than 20 years to come to the point where too many boats chasing a limited resource, which led to the first crash between 1983 and 1985. The government managed the fishery together with scientist and industry – fishers did not participate. Scientific data was largely ignored in favor of industry interests. In 1986, the government lifted the prohibition to land egg-bearing lobsters and tolerated the use of gillnets, there was no continuity and not much enforcement.

The medium-size fleet resisted over time and started to use illegal gear, such as gillnets and hookah diving, which led to conflicts with artisanal fishers. Landing of undersized lobsters for the US and the domestic market became a big problem, but there was no export control in Brazil's ports. The illegal fleet represented an ever increasing fishing effort.

The artisanal sailboat fleet increased but never was a danger for the resource due to its insignificant fishing effort. Fishing with traps is normally limited to 3 to 4 months, but the fishery makes an important contribution to food security. However, the increasing number of illegal boats led to serious conflicts at sea – and the second lobster war.

In 1993, leaders and fishers in the small community of Prainha do Canto Verde – where I live – decided to do something about the problems and mobilized neighboring coastal communities to challenge government with a spectacular voyage of a *jangada* to Rio de Janeiro 2,000 miles away. The 74 day trip, with 20 stops in eight states, aimed to unite coastal communities of Brazil and demand changes from Government.

The protest was against illegal fishing of lobsters, real estate speculation, and the demand for participation in fisheries management. Two years later on April 4, 1995, 500 fishers and fisherwomen made another protest trip, this time to the office of State Governor of Ceará. A delegation demanded for the creation of a co-management committee where fishers and NGOs could contribute to the management of the fishery on equal terms. The result was the first co-management committee in Brazil's fishing history, and six months later the first lobster management plan was presented to the government. If the plan had been implemented such as it was, today we would have the best managed lobster fishery in the world.

Fishers started co-management:

- i) Created local fishing regulations and beach tribunal against offenders,
- ii) Collected contribution from fishers to buy a fast boat and helped to finance enforcement actions with fishers participation,
- iii) Mobilized other communities through the State Fisher Forum,
- iv) Mapped fishing-grounds and collected fishery data to support demand to the Federal Government to create artisanal fishing reserve in the area,
- v) Fishers started a campaign to use Marine Protected Areas for efficient fisheries management, and
- vi) A pre-assessment for MSC Certification Program was carried out in 2001 in Prainha do Canto Verde.

In 2000, after fisheries authorities officially admitted that they were not able to control illegal exports of undersized lobsters to the US, we started cooperating with NOAA enforcement, which led to the indictment of a lobster importer in Miami. This was the end of undersized lobster exports to the US.

Brazilian President Lula took a courageous step in 2004 by creating the National Lobster Management Committee, and fishers and NGOs contributed to the revision of fishery regulations with concrete proposals and studies on the impact of artisanal fishers on stocks. The committees work was hampered by conflicts within government which pitched the developers at the Fishery Ministry against the conservationists at the Environmental Ministry, and we got caught in the middle of the fight. There was a tug of war to increase fishing effort when common sense suggested the reduction of fishing effort through effective control of the fleet and the supply chain. But the main problem was lack of political will to implement the changes and to enforce the law.

The lack of reliable scientific data is another big problem. NGOs are pressing for a bigger voice of legitimate fishers in the committee and effective measures against illegal fishing.

We realized that we needed to raise support for our cause abroad and started to network with people like the Monterrey Bay Aquarium, which published a devastating seafood report about Brazilian lobsters, we came to the GCFI lobster workshop in San Andres, participated at the FAO spiny lobster technical workshop in Merida in 2006, and spoke at the Sea Food Summit in Jacksonville, Florida in 2007.

The seminar we organized in 2006 brought together managers, scientists, international experts, and a lot of fishers and showed the way to the future. We had FAO and other international support. It was clear that we needed to mobilize consumers, especially in the US where 95% of the lobsters go, and let importers know about the state of the fishery and press for better quality and certification of the catch. More than ever, we need to mobilize public opinion to let President Dilma know that we need to turn things around if we want to save the lobster fishery

Our work had become well known around the world, and in 2008 UNEP asked us to present our lobster fishery as a candidate for a supply chain pilot project with the objective to recover the fishery. The offer was great, but it took some time to convince the government. The project is the first step to certification against MSC criteria. But right now, the federal government is once again slowing things down, so we are negotiating with certifier Bureau Veritas of Spain to start an origin of responsible fishery certification project which will increase the pressure on our government. Who knows, things start moving by the time Brazil wins the World Cup in 2014 and players and visitors will eat certified lobsters from artisanal fisheries. But, some big obstacles still lie ahead.

The total absence of authority has led to the criminalization of the fishery, with 90% of lobsters that consumers eat coming from illegal fishing, and this with the help of exporters who don't care about the origin of the catch and export anything that comes their way even with *Salmonel-*

la. After 20 years of irresponsible fishing, the crash that we have been predicting has arrived, exports dropped 50% this year and the trend is down, down, down. Poor quality has led to lower prices in the US, whole lobster prices are down 20% this year, armed conflicts between artisanal fishers and divers have accelerated, and the Second Lobsters War is a reality.

The remaining legal fishers - 80 motor vessels and 500 sail boats out of a total of over 3.000 licensed boats - are taking to the road again. Last week on the beach in Fortaleza, they declared themselves on strike unless the government closes the fishery until April 2014. This will give government and the fishery sector time to come together and implement a set of proposals to stop the decline, recover stocks and implement the Fisheries Improvement Program which resulted from the UNEP supply chain project. Lobsters need the time to recover from 20 years of irresponsible fishing and start to reproduce in peace.

This is just the beginning of a campaign to show consumers around the world the responsibility of Brazil's fishers for the future of the resource. Please: Don't buy and consume any Brazilian lobsters before the Football World Cup in 2014. Knowing the style of our President Dilma, I am convinced that she will accept the challenge, and she will understand that the fisher's proposals makes social, economical, and environmental sense. It will cost a lot of money, yes, but a study by the New Economic Foundation in London shows that the return from a sustainable fishery will bring in long-term revenue and the social benefits will be very important. Fishers are ready to share the cost with a financial contribution per kg of lobster. Fishers demand the creation of a top-level working group which will have 90 days to draw up a new lobster management plan with the participation of fishers and civil society. We are setting up two support groups, one in Brazil and another in the Americas and hope you will join us in this exciting venture which will show the world that artisanal and small-scale fishers are the key to sustainable fisheries.

Campaign of Fishers and Small Boat Owners from the Coast of Ceará in Support of Responsible and Sustainable Fishing — www.prainhadocantoverde.org.

ABSTRACTS

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