

Fishing out Chile's fisherfolk

The Law of Fisheries and Aquaculture of Chile¹ is one of the most aggressive pieces of legislation supporting the privatisation of natural resources in the world. Although it does not mention environmental services, it follows exactly the same principles and uses similar language. In the name of conservation, the law created transferable catchment quotas and management areas to be allocated by the government.

Local fishing communities (many of them indigenous peoples) were granted a reduced exclusive area of five miles along the coasts of Chile to fish in. Artisan fishing has been expelled from the oceans outside the five mile limit, which have been granted exclusively to industrial fishing, much of it in the hands of transnational companies. But industrial fishing is not banned from the "exclusive" 5-mile strip; catchment quotas can be allocated to industrial fishing companies if artisanal fishing organisations do not claim or use them. Right from the start, the law enabled fishing corporations to control 80% of fishing resources; a figure that can easily increase as big companies claim access to the areas that artisan fishers are not using. The environmental regulations imposed on big companies are lower than those imposed on artisanal fishing, and overexploitation by industrial vessels is affecting all areas. A strict policing system has been set up, and artisanal fisherfolk can be sent to jail if they catch more than their quotas. Chilean fisherfolk organisations are demanding that coastal areas be declared disaster zones due to the extremely low fish numbers.

Coastal areas are not exclusive to fisherfolk either. Industry can claim big areas for aquaculture. In order to access to the coastal area, artisan fisherfolk must organise themselves according to governmental rules, request permission from the government, comply with a management plan sanctioned by the government and pay an annual licence that exceeds US\$15 per hectare, theoretically to be used for conservation activities.

In practice, the catchment quotas and management plans have imposed serious limitations to artisanal fishing, both in area and in quantity of fish caught. That, and overexploitation by industrial vessels have created a major crisis. Fisherfolk organisations have indicated that they can no longer make a living out of fishing.² Even worse, the organisational structures imposed by the government have disrupted the traditional organisation among indigenous fisherfolk and in practice have taken away their rights.³

1 - <http://www.subpesca.cl/pagina%20juridica/page2.html>

2 - See <http://www.dianopyme.cl/newtenberg/1639/article-62265.html>, http://www.cedepesca.org.ar/noticias/131204/crisis_de_la_merluza_en_chile.htm
http://www.cedepesca.org.ar/noticias/011204/barcazo_bahia_lirquen.htm

3 - The Iafkenche are the indigenous fisherfolk that inhabit over 500 kilometer of coastline in southern Chile. They have actively fought the Chilean law of fisheries, indicating that "the law has left indigenous peoples without access to marine resources because their traditional and historical organizations will not be allowed to register to exploit the wealth of the sea" <http://www.mapuexpress.net/?act=publications&id=82>