

Successful mitigation case of small-scale fishers of Tárcoles

Germán Ignacio Pochet Ballester, Vivienne Solis Rivera, David Chacón Rojas

CoopeTárcoles R.L

CoopeSoliDar R.L

Abstract

The co-existence of small-scale and semi-industrial fisheries in Tárcoles, Costa Rica, degenerated into conflicts between these two sectors. Conflicts were reinforced by the over-exploitation of the main target species, the white shrimp, which ultimately disappeared from the catches. In 2010, the two sectors reached an agreement establishing a withdrawal area for the semi-industrial vessels of up to one mile starting from the coastline –although the small-scale sector had initially asked for a 3 miles withdrawal area. Soon after the agreement, the positive impact on the white shrimp resource became evident, as the species returned to the catch, and its presence grew over the years. In view of this successful experience, in 2017, the State expanded the coverage to the whole country and increased the withdrawal for the semi-industrial fisheries to 5 miles.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Description of the fishery

Around the world, the small-scale fishing sector and the semi-industrial fleets have a long history of conflicts and rivalry. For the most part, this situation is due to disputes over resources and fishing areas, since both fleets seek the same or similar areas to operate.

Costa Rica ended this cycle of conflicts in 2010, with a win-win negotiation between the small-scale fisheries and the semi-industrial fisheries, where the latter agreed to withdraw from the one mile area starting from the coastline. This agreement was limited to the Responsible Marine Fishing Area (RFMA) of Tárcoles; the governance of the area is shared between the government and the small-scale fishers.

The Tárcoles community operates less than 100 vessels, mainly with outboard or inboard engines of less than 100 CV. These are less than 12 metres in length, with less than 10 GT tonnage and with covered ice containers. The fishing trips take between 3 to 12 hours on average.

1.2 Economic contribution and social implications of the fishing activity

In general terms, there are around 100 fishers in the community; some additional 50 women are involved as well. This activity is practically the only way to make a living for these people; all of their earnings thus come from fishing. This implies that these fishers are engaged in full-time, year-round fishing activities.

2. MANAGEMENT OF THE FISHERY AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES

2.1 Management of the fishery

The Costa Rican Institute of Fishing and Aquaculture (INCOPECA) is the governing body in the fisheries field, which in turn is under the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

2.2 Brief history of former rights-based approaches used in the fishery

Prior to 2010, there was no rights-based approach used in the fishery. The conflicts between small-scale and semi-industrial fishers were strong. In addition, some factors placed the small-scale sector at a disadvantage vis-a-vis the semi-industrial sector, including the fact that the latter had representation in the INCOPECA, while the participation of the small-scale fishers in this institution was very limited.

2.3 Rights-based approach: allocation and characteristics

In the negotiation process, an agreement was reached in the year 2010, in which the semi-industrial vessels accepted a withdrawal area of up to one mile starting from the coastline of the Pacific Ocean, even though the initial expectations of the small-scale sector was to agree on a 3 mile zone. Nevertheless, the small-scale fishers of Tárcoles, Pógeres and Playa Azul agreed to the terms with the semi-industrial sector.

The agreement, however, included some difficulties. There were some factors that placed the small-scale sector at a disadvantage with regard to the semi-industrial sector, including the lack of organization. This was in some way solved by the mediation of CoopeTárcoles in the process. Another entity that helped the fishers and mediated between the sectors was CoopeSoliDar, which facilitated the dialogue, the agreements and contributed its vision about human rights, marine conservation, as well as its approaches on participation and popular education.

In this context of disparity between the fleets, a successful agreement was reached in which the semi-industrial vessels accepted a withdrawal area of up to one mile starting from the coastline of the Pacific Ocean, even though the initial expectations of the small-scale sector was to agree on a 3 mile zone. Everyone –including environmentalists—viewed the agreement as unfavourable for this particular reason.

3. CONTRIBUTION OF THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY

3.1 Sustainable use of the resources

In the few months following the agreement, it had already become clear that the agreement was a great arrangement for both sectors and for the ecosystem. The discussion, oriented towards the participative ordering of marine spaces, allowed for the first reappearance of the white shrimp, an important species for the small-scale fishers and for the food chain of the ecosystem.

3.2 Economic viability of the fishery

The agreement created a win-win situation for both fisheries, the semi-industrial and the small-scale fisheries. The reappearance of the white shrimp resource made revenue increase for both sectors.

3.3 Social equality

The fact that small-scale fishers managed to derive results from the negotiation, increased their social standing in the society. Moreover, the successful implementation led to an even more important agreement at the national level. The negotiation between both fleets prompted the process associated with the presidential directive 21-P, published in the Gaceta No. 101 of 27 May 2015, translated as ‘For the creation of a General Policy of Sustainable Exploitation of Shrimp, Job Creation and Combat of Poverty’. Therefore, seven years after the initial agreement in Tárcoles, a dialogue table was created with all fishing sectors, the state institutions, the academia and the civil society, which yielded a participative zoning map in benefit of all the sectors and the environment. As a result, the model agreement of Tárcoles was extended to the whole country and on both coasts. The results were later ratified, institutionalized and established as legal norms through INCOPESCA’s Managing Board agreements AJDIP/158-2017 of 20 April 2017 and AJDIP/483-2015 of the 13 November 2015. Thus, INCOPESCA approved a general zoning map for the whole country where the semi-industrial fleet had to withdraw in a range of 5 miles from the coastline. It is important to note the mediation of CoopeSoliDar in this process as well, both for the dialogue’s success and for the elaboration of the zoning map with a participative approach.

4. MAIN CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

4.1 Challenges for the fishery

Trawler fisheries have long been under attack from the environmentalist community. This led to the prohibition of shrimp trawling in 2013. In theory, fishing rights for trawlers would not be renewed, and the last fishing licenses were supposed to expire in 2018. However, in practice, these fishing rights continue to be renewed, as the impact on various jobs would be too great. The strengthening of the two sectors in their capacity to negotiate and come to agreements will be, without doubt, fundamental for the future with the aim of achieving sustainable fisheries and a fair and equitable distribution of benefits.

4.2 Improving fishery sustainability in the future

The successful implementation of the agreement has already shown its positive impact on sustainability. The perpetuation of the agreement will continue to have positive effects on the recovery of the valuable shrimp resource.

4.3 Lessons learned

Several lessons were learnt from this experience

1. Negotiation over rights is a long process, but it is possible when small-scale fishers become organized and aware of their power.
2. The agreement on zonal fisheries allocation can be reached between private actors and without the presence of the State.
3. The positive environmental situation of the agreement has to be studied by research institutes to underscore the impression of the recovery of the resource.

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