UPDATES FROM THE WATER

OCTOBER 2020

Stay up to date with the exciting progress WWF Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) are making!

Across the seafood supply chain, WWF is working with retailers, food service companies, manufacturers, and suppliers, to responsibly source seafood from fisheries that have met the standard requirements of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). By encouraging non-certified fisheries to improve their practices and ultimately meet the MSC standard, seafood buyers can help increase the performance of their source fisheries and decrease negative impacts on the water.

* Note: FIP stages and Progress Ratings are based on FisheryProgress.org.

ECUADOR MAHI MAHI

Gear Type: Longline
Volume: 9,672 MT
FIP Stage: 5 (Improvements on the Water)
Progress Rating: Not Yet Available
Entered MSC Full Assessment February 2019

Ecuador's mahi mahi fishery is one of its most ecologically and economically valuable artisanal fisheries. The fishery is a top exporter to the U.S. In addition to providing nutrition for people, mahi mahi is an important part of the marine ecosystem, providing food for many top marine predators such as sharks and dolphins. Since the start of the FIP in 2010, more than 10,000 fishers have been engaged in FIP efforts through trainings on fishing regulations and best fishing practices, conducting gear exchanges to replace traditional J hooks with circle hooks to reduce sea turtle by-catch, welcoming on-board observers, and most recently, piloting a digital traceability system to test electronic logbooks and cameras on-board their vessels.

The FIP has helped to change fishers' attitudes for the better: fishers understand the importance of improving the fishery not only to keep their markets open but also to ensure they can continue to rely on fishing for their livelihood. Also, by learning how to better handle sea turtle by-catch they have improved their efficiency, and they are more open to adopting management measures because they participate in developing them.

Unfortunately, in the first few months of the coronavirus pandemic, many artisanal fishers were negatively affected: the fleet was reduced by almost 80% as fishers refrained from fishing due to health risks and government-mandated travel restrictions. Almost 150 artisanal fishers have died from COVID-19, and many isolated communities suffered due to food insecurity for the first few months of the pandemic; recently, however, the government has improved its response, communities have begun to recover, and fishers have been able to resume their activities. The mahi mahi season is expected to open on time in October.

The fishery is currently in the MSC full assessment process and was given a 6-month extension to complete it by February 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. One key action that the fishery must take to get MSC certified is develop a bi-national action plan with Peru for the joint management of this highly migratory species. The Ecuadorian government has reached out to its counterparts in Peru to agree on a plan, however the Peruvian authorities have been slow to respond. Thanks to a letter sent from US buyer FIP participants to the Peruvian government in June reiterating the importance of this Bi-national Action Plan, the issue has been elevated once again in Peru. The letter was shared widely with fishers, exporters, the regional government in Piura, and other key stakeholders who are working together with WWF and the Ecuadorian government to pressure the Peruvian national government to agree to a plan. Since a bi-national Action Plan is key to the fishery achieving MSC certification, this is the main activity that the FIP will be focusing on, and hopes to achieve, over the next several months.

PERU MAHI MAHI

Gear Type: Longline
Volume: 61,909 MT
FIP Stage: Stage 4 (Improvements in Fishing Practices or Fishery Management)
Progress Rating: B (Good Progress)
Start Date: November 2013

Peru's mahi mahi fishery supports 4,200 fishermen and serves as a key link in the marine food chain, providing sustenance for sharks, dolphins, and other ocean predators. Peru is also a leading source of the world's mahi mahi and, like Ecuador, a top exporter to the United States. In 2018, exports to the U.S. generated over $92 million. Approximately 1,500 fishers have been engaged directly in FIP efforts to pilot WWF's mobile electronic catch documentation system, TrazApp, to improve the collection and transparency of catch data, make it easier to receive fishing permits, and improve safety at sea by allowing vessels to be monitored in real-time. The coronavirus pandemic did not negatively impact the mahi mahi market since the season was ending when the pandemic began, however artisanal mahi mahi fishing communities were impacted.

WWF-US / Molly Edmonds

In addition, FIP activities have been delayed due to becoming lower priority during the pandemic as industry and government prioritized addressing COVID impacts. Still, the Peruvian government expressed interest in using TrazApp to help monitor the status of fishing communities during the pandemic, one advancement that has helped to gain more support from the government for the use and adoption of TrazApp across other fisheries in Peru.

WWF has continued to work with the Peruvian government on the importance of meeting with their counterparts in Ecuador to develop a bi-national action plan for the joint management of mahi mahi, a requirement for both fisheries to meet the MSC standard. A letter from US buyer FIP participants to the Peruvian government in June reiterating the importance of this bi-national action plan, has elevated the issue once again. WWF shared the letter widely with fishers, exporters, the regional government in Piura, and other key stakeholders, who are helping to pressure the Peruvian national government to agree to a plan.

Over the past several months, six companies (COINREFRI, Fish Olg, Altamar Foods, Spring Valley Fruit/Agropesca, Mai Shi Group, and Produpesca) have joined the Peru Mahi Alliance, a pre-competitive platform for exporters to advance the FIP through political advocacy efforts, funding, and FIP activity support. Two more companies are expected to join soon. WWF and the Peru Mahi Alliance agreed to an annual workplan through 2021 to: conduct a training workshop and implement by-catch reduction measures on vessels which Peru Mahi Alliance members purchase from; pilot an onboard observer and camera monitoring program; support Peruvian government efforts to develop a mahi mahi fishery management regulation; write letters to the Peruvian government expressing their concerns over the slow process to “formalize” (issue fishing permits to) the mahi mahi fleet; and expand the pilot of TrazApp to test the traceability of the information generated down the supply chain with exporters and US importers and ensure it meets the US Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) requirements and Global Dialogue for Seafood Traceability (GDST) standards and guidelines. This last action will help ensure consumers of mahi mahi in the United States that the products they are consuming are legal and traceable.

NICARAGUA SPINY LOBSTER - TRAP FISHERY

Gear Type: Traps
Volume: 3,3,47 MT
FIP Stage: Stage 5 (Improvements on the Water)
Progress Rating: A (Advanced Progress)
Start Date: January 2012

Nicaragua is the eighth largest lobster producer in the world and the largest in Central America, with an average production of over 4,300 tons per year for the trap and dive fisheries, and approximately 3,300 tons annually for the trap fishery alone. The spiny lobster fishery in Nicaragua generates about $55 million annually from exports, making it one of the country's most important fisheries. The industrial trap fleet is made up of 64 vessels which employ 767 fishers. As the FIP is led at the national level by Nicaragua's Fisheries Institute (INPESCA), fishers are mostly engaged via meetings to update them on management regulations and FIP progress. Since the start of the FIP in 2013, fishers and fishing communities are benefiting from stable catches and increasing employment opportunities in the fishery. The FIP has helped generate new information about the impact of the fishery on the lobster population, the habitat, and ecosystem, which has helped the Nicaraguan government to improve its management measures in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery and minimize its impact on the environment.

To date, the coronavirus pandemic has had minimal impact on the Nicaragua lobster fishery. The season opened in July and although the decreased demand for lobster from the international market is likely to impact the fishery, the full impact has not yet been measured. Despite travel restrictions due to the pandemic, activities have continued with few delays as the FIP has adapted to conducting virtual workshops and meetings.

FIP efforts this year are focused on completing the first ever bi-national stock assessment for spiny lobster—a stock shared with Honduras. The joint assessment, which is required for the Honduras and Nicaragua lobster fisheries to meet the MSC standard, will provide a more accurate measure of the impact of both countries' fisheries on the lobster population and will inform whether additional management measures need to be implemented. In March, just before the coronavirus pandemic hit and travel restrictions were put in place, Nicaraguan government scientists led a successful workshop in Honduras in which government researchers, university scientists, and processing plant managers were trained on the new stock assessment model and how to best collect catch data at the plants to inform the stock assessment.

The adoption of the Nicaraguan lobster fishery management plan has been put on hold due to it being lower priority during the coronavirus pandemic and there is currently no date set for when it will be adopted. WWF will continue to urge INPESCA to finalize and adopt it as soon as possible. Priority activities expected to occur over the next several months include: compiling Honduras catch data from processing plants to inform the binational stock assessment by September; conducting a virtual workshop to run the stock assessment model by October; developing a strategy to combat illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing by January 2021; and finalizing the binational stock assessment report by February 2021.

Mac Stone/ WWF-US

HONDURAS SPINY LOBSTER - TRAP FISHERY

Gear Type: Traps
Volume: 1,803 MT
FIP Stage: Stage 5 (Improvements on the Water)
Progress Rating: B (Good Progress)
Start Date: July 2012

Honduras is the second largest lobster producer in Central America after Nicaragua with an average production of over 4,000 tons per year for the trap and dive fisheries, which generates about $42 million dollars annually in exports to the United States. The industrial trap fleet is made up of 87 vessels which employ approximately 1,500 fishers. Fishers are engaged in the trap FIP mainly through the industrial fishing associations APESCA and APICAH, where representatives attend FIP meetings to get updated on the latest management regulations and FIP actions. The FIP has helped fishers to better understand the fishery management regulations and improve their catch data collection efforts by learning what information is required to inform the stock assessment. Under the FIP, studies have been conducted to evaluate the impact of the fishery on the habitat. The research found that the fishery has a medium impact on deep coral reefs and in response the government is implementing new management measures to reduce the fishery's impact on the environment.

Like Nicaragua, the coronavirus pandemic has had minimal impact on the Honduras lobster fishery since the season opened in July. Although the decreased demand for lobster from the international market is likely to impact the fishery, the full impact has not yet been measured. Despite travel restrictions due to the pandemic, fishers are fishing at their full capacity and FIP activities have continued to advance with few delays as the FIP has adapted to conducting virtual workshops and meetings.

FIP efforts this year are focused on completing the first ever bi-national stock assessment for spiny lobster. The joint stock assessment, which is required for the Honduras and Nicaragua lobster fisheries to meet the MSC standard, will provide a more accurate measure of the impact of both countries' fisheries on the lobster population and will inform whether additional management measures need to be implemented.

In March, just before the coronavirus pandemic hit and travel restrictions were put in place, Nicaraguan government scientists led a successful workshop in Honduras in which government researchers, university scientists, and processing plant managers were trained on the new stock assessment model and how to best collect catch data at the plants to inform the stock assessment. Priority activities expected to occur over the next several months include: compiling Honduras catch data from processing plants for the bi-national stock assessment by September; conducting a virtual workshop to run the stock assessment model by October; conducting a study to determine the risk of the fishery impacting the ecosystem by October; and drafting a Honduras lobster fishery management plan and finalizing the bi-national stock assessment report by February 2021.

PERU SQUID

Gear Type: Squid Jig
Volume: 323, 337 MT
FIP Stage: 3 (FIP Implementation)
Progress Rating: C (Some Recent Progress)
Start Date: February 2018

The jumbo squid fishery is one of Peru's most important artisanal fisheries, employing more than 105,000 Peruvians and providing low-cost, high-quality protein to much of the population. It is also one of the largest squid export fisheries globally, generating $860 million in exports in 2019.

The Peruvian jumbo squid FIP is the first comprehensive squid FIP in the world. WWF worked closely with Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP), the Peruvian government, and the private sector to develop a comprehensive plan to help the fishery meet the MSC standard. Several exporters have formed the Peruvian National Chamber for Giant Squid (CAPECAL), which is working to become established as a legal entity but has been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic. The independent industry association promotes the conservation and management of giant squid in Peru, which includes leading the implementation of the Peru squid FIP through political advocacy efforts, funding, and FIP activity support.

Approximately 1,500 fishers across three cooperatives have been engaged directly in FIP efforts, mainly through piloting WWF's mobile electronic catch documentation system, TrazApp, to improve the collection and transparency of catch data, make it easier to receive fishing permits, and improve safety at sea by allowing vessels to be monitored in real-time. Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus pandemic, most fishing stopped in April and May. Fishing resumed in June, but because of an overproduction of squid to make up for the loss of catches in previous months, the prices dropped drastically. WWF is working with fishers to better organize themselves and reduce overcapacity to prevent similar problems in the future. In addition, FIP activities have been delayed due to becoming lower priority during the pandemic as industry and government prioritized addressing COVID impacts. Still, the Peruvian government expressed interest in using TrazApp to help monitor the status of fishing communities during the pandemic, one advancement that has helped to gain more support from the government for the use and adoption of TrazApp across other fisheries in Peru.


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The South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO) issued its first-ever Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) for jumbo flying squid in international waters in February. The CMM, which will go into effect in January 2021, will regulate the capture of jumbo flying squid in international waters, an important first step toward addressing some of the key science and management deficiencies in the fishery. Legalization of the currently unregulated artisanal fleet is the mandatory first step toward complying with other guidelines of the CMM, including preparation of catch reports per vessel, design of a biological monitoring system for research purposes, increased observer coverage, and installation of satellite equipment for vessel monitoring systems.

To address this issue, SFP gathered industry signatures on a letter to the Peruvian government requesting the formalization of the Peru artisanal squid fleet as soon as possible. Failing to do so will put the fishery at risk to be classified as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) by the SPRFMO, the international markets, and consumers, thus threatening the socio-economic status of thousands of Peruvian families as well as the sustainability of the fishery. The letter will be sent to Peruvian authorities by the end of October. In the meantime, WWF and SFP are continuing to work with authorities to advise on how to speed up the formalization process and grant fishers their legal fishing permits.

Priority activities expected to occur over the next several months include: continuing to advance formalization efforts working with the Peruvian government, industry, and fishers; working with authorities and key stakeholders to update the squid fishery management regulation; and scaling up the use of TrazApp with fishers, landing sites, government, processors, and importers.

VIETNAM YELLOWFIN TUNA

Gear Type: Handline
Volume: 16,500 MT
FIP Stage: 5 (Improvements on the Water)
Progress Rating: A (Advanced Progress)
Start Date: April 2014

Yellowfin tuna is Vietnam's most valuable marine export making it a critical source of jobs and income with over 1800 vessels and 9000 fishers engaged in the fishery. The Vietnam yellowfin tuna FIP is focused on reducing by-catch, improving stock management, and increasing traceability through engagement with fishers, government officials, and the private sector.

Since February 2020, the FIP progressed on several priority activities, despite the impacts of the pandemic that initially decreased exports from the FIP by up to 50%. In May 2020, FIP stakeholders completed the beta version of Vietnam's first-ever electronic logbook to collect critical information on fishing vessels. The e-logbook has the potential to strengthen catch monitoring, improve vessel coverage and reporting, and further enable the mitigation of negative impacts on other species, including sharks and sea turtles. The Ministry of Agricultural Development (MARD) has confirmed interest in cooperating on e-logbook implementation and we will soon launch a 10-vessel e-logbook pilot program. The FIP stakeholders have also engaged with the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) to develop an Android-based application with several yellowfin tuna processors. The application will generate GDST-ready key data elements using the information from the existing FIP trace code and e-logbooks with the ambition of demonstrating full chain traceability.

Beyond the pilots mentioned above, priority activities expected to occur over the next several months include advocating for the establishment of species-specific quota limits, researching and conducting risk assessments on bait fish, continued investigation of by-catch mitigation strategies for sea turtles and sharks, and incorporating a by-catch strategy into the National Tuna Management Plan.

THAILAND BLUE SWIMMING CRAB

Gear Type: Gillnet and Traps
Volume: 12,000 MT
FIP Stage: 4 (Improvements in Fishing Practices or Fishery Management)
Progress Rating: B (Good Practices)
Start Date: February 2017

Thailand's Surat Thani blue swimming crab fishery has an export value of $60 to $80 million and includes approximately 1,300 small-scale vessels and 100 commercial vessels. Over the years, the blue swimming crab population dropped. Several issues facing the fishery led to the decline, including over-exploitation in heavily fished inshore areas, harvest of undersized crabs and egg-carrying females, lack of a management plan or harvest strategy, and lack of enforcement capacity. Industry stakeholders created a fishery improvement project to address these challenges. The pandemic caused some delays as the government issued an emergency decree from March until July, restricting travel. Despite this, the FIP continued to make notable progress - a genetic analysis of the population was conducted, better information on endangered, threatened, and protected species and habitat distribution was provided by the government, and the Fisheries Management Plan was revised.

Over the coming year, FIP stakeholders will work to understand the impact of ghost gear on the blue swimming crab stock and the ecosystem, hold a stakeholder consultation to determine appropriate minimum landing size, and update the stock assessment model a new method. The current stock assessment model shows is around a healthy level. We anticipate the updated model will show a similar result.

WWF-Malaysia / Eric Madeja

This FIP has historically engaged many stakeholders including fishers. A community leader is a member of the Provincial Fisheries Committee to represent small-scale fishers, sharing their experience and challenges. He has voting rights in the committee in developing local regulations.

Become a WWF FIP participant today by visiting:
https://seafoodsustainability.org/fisheries/fishery-improvement-projects-signup

Being a WWF FIP Participant provides a pre-competitive space for companies to engage with fisheries in their supply chains and leverage power across multiple companies to drive fishery improvements forward. By signing on to support a FIP, you are joining forces with other leaders in the industry that seek to help conserve marine ecosystems and advance the livelihoods for millions of people who depend on them.

WWF recognizes FIP participants on the industry website, SeafoodSustainability.org. WWF also works with FIP participants to communicate the benefits of FIPs among key buyers, sustainable business leaders, employees, environmental activists, and other key constituencies.

Together we can protect oceans and the food and livelihoods they can sustainably provide.

For more information or to partner with WWF, please visit SeafoodSustainability.org or contact us at info@seafoodsustainability.org