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Forum for Sustainable Fisheries

Comments

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The proposal notes, by way of introduction that “the history of various attempts to manage marine fisheries has been marked by fragmentation rather than coordination.” This, obviously, needs to be corrected. Fragmentation, however, has to be overcome not only within the fisheries sector, but within the wider context of ocean and coastal management, of ocean and coastal governance. The proposal, which is excellent, can succeed only within a wider framework of institutional change.

The analysis of the fisheries crisis is succinct and well done; but the remedies proposed are not efficient by themselves. It is noted that “within individual countries, political decision makers and institutions have been unable (and/or unwilling) to respond quickly to the urgent need to reduce fishing effort. Most of the management measures that are enacted gain only limited consensus as to who should bear the brunt of the costs of reduction in fleet, processing facilities, small-scale fisheries, and unemployment. In many instances the importance of reaching a consensus among all affected parties has not even been recognized..”

This is really the crux of the problem; and it cannot be resolved by a fisheries forum alone. There has to be a forum, at the community level, at the national level, at the regional level and at the global level, where a fisheries forum can cooperate with other governmental and nongovernmental entities capable of creating a social safety net, interacting with other ocean uses and users. Without this, over-capacity reduction efforts are doomed to failure.

The proposed composition of the global Forum is good. The “other multinational agencies” mentioned among the participants should include UNCTAD, UNDP, and ILO to look after the equity and social problems.

One of the problems is that the establishment of global fora remains ineffective if it is not paralleled by institutional change at the regional, national, and local level, including the establishment of effective linkages between these levels.

The “swat teams” appear to reflect a “top-down” approach, which remains ineffective if it is not complemented by a “bottom-up” approach

I am not quite sure what is meant by a "rights-based fishery." Does this include ITQ? I have very grave doubts whether the "privatization" of the living resources of the sea can contribute to a solution of the crisis. I fear it would merely aggravate it. My fears are re-enforced by the rather good paper "Promoting Sustainable Fisheries," by Anne Platt McGinn, in the 1998 *State of the World, a Worldwatch Institute Report*. "Rights-based" and "community-based" management are hard to reconcile. See also P.S. Dasgupta and G.M. Heal, *Economic Theory and Exhaustible Resources*, Cambridge University Press, 1979. According to these authors, attempts to create a market through "privatization" of the ocean's living resources "is rather like searching for the Holy Grail..."

I believe some profound rethinking of the goals of fisheries management is needed. So long as the overriding goal is market-driven financial profit, no solution can be found. If the overriding goal is food and employment for local populations, then community-based co-management, with proper linkages to regional and global fora, might hold the best promise for a really new course.

The By-catch discard problem is an excretion of the perversity of the present management system. Fao's figure of 27 million tons annually is equivalent to one-third of the annual marine catch! And it does not include marine mammals, sea-birds and turtles! Laws and regulations are needed which do not encourage, but rather prohibit, the discarding of "by-catch." While technologies are being developed to reduce and minimize such "by-catch," fiscal policies might be designed which would encourage commercial fishing companies to charter factory ships to relieve fishing boats of their "by-catch," and process it at sea, as food, feedstock or fertilizer, for the benefit of local communities. I believe such a measure should have a high priority

To sum up these rambling remarks: I think the proposal represents a good contribution to a solution of the problem: but it is a contribution, not a solution by itself. It must be seen in a broader context of institutional and economic change, without which it will achieve little.