



**Fish stakes: the pros and cons of the
Marine Stewardship Council initiative: a
debate from the pages of SAMUDRA Report**

Item Type	monograph
Publisher	International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
Download date	06/01/2023 21:33:37
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/1834/18220

Fish Stakes

The pros and cons of the Marine Stewardship Council initiative:
a debate from the pages of SAMUDRA Report

International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India

FISH STAKES

The pros and cons of the Marine Stewardship Council initiative:
a debate from the pages of SAMUDRA Report

Published by

ICSF, 27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India

October 1998

Edited by

SAMUDRA Editorial

Designed by

Satish Babu

Printed at

Nagaraj and Company Pvt. Ltd., Chennai

Information and articles contained in this publication may be reproduced freely.
However, acknowledging ICSF would be appreciated.

International Collective in Support of Fishworkers

27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India

Tel: (91) 44 - 2827 5303

Fax: (91) 44 - 2825 4457

Email: mdsaab06@giasmdo1.vsnl.net.in

Contents

Preface.....	1
Going green about the gills.....	3
New hope for marine fisheries.....	5
Whose labels? Whose benefit?.....	9
The mantle of ‘going green’.....	11
A View from the Third World.....	12
A Powerful arrow in the quiver.....	16
Cut adrift.....	18
Who’s being seduced?.....	23
Don’t be harsh on the MSC.....	25
Open and transparent.....	26
An appeal for co-operation.....	28
When sandals meet suits.....	32

Preface

In early 1996, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the multinational giant, Unilever, announced their joint commitment to establish the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) to design and implement market-driven incentives for sustainable fishing. Between July 1996 and January 1998, through several issues of SAMUDRA Report, the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) carried out a debate on the MSC process and its relevance to artisanal and small-scale fishworkers, especially in the developing countries. To the best of our knowledge, this was the first-ever debate on the MSC initiative.

The concerns of ICSF are not whether ecolabelling initiatives are relevant or not; rather, they are about the practicability of a private accreditation programme such as the MSC claiming to promote sustainable fishing, based on universal standards that are developed without due consultation with fishworker organizations and that do not take into consideration the diversity of fisheries in the developing countries. ICSF is also concerned about an approach that could curtail the autonomy of fishers in the artisanal and smallscale sector. Given the unequal distribution of purchasing power and economic clout that are inherently unfavourable to developing countries, we have further reservations about the use of the Northern market to ensure better conservation and management of marine capture fisheries in the South.

The writing on the wall is clear. If developing countries do not give sufficient emphasis to fisheries management questions, powerful environmental organizations and fish trading companies will attempt greater, conservation of fisheries resources through harnessing consumer power to their advantage. It will have undesirable consequences for both the governments and fishers of developing countries. We would hope for greater efforts to better conserve and manage resources within national waters in consultation with all significant stakeholders. This would avoid the unpleasantness of unilateral sustainability criteria being thrust upon them from outside.

In this context, we felt it would be appropriate to reproduce the articles from SAMUDRA Report in the form of a dossier on the occasion of the Technical Consultation on the Feasibility of Developing Non-discriminatory Technical Guidelines for Eco-labelling of Products from Marine Capture Fisheries, organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations from 21 to 23, October 1998.

This dossier is meant mainly for the consideration of the delegates from developing countries. We hope it will create a better understanding of the implications of a non-State ecolabelling initiative like the MSC for fisheries in the developing world.

Sebastian Mathew
Executive Secretary
International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)

Going green about the gills

It takes two hands to clap-and when these belong to giants like the multi national Unilever and the high-profile World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the result could be a thunderclap. Precisely such a blast can be expected from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) planned by these two organizations.

Unilever, with global sales of US\$ 900 million in fish products and a 20 per cent share of the European and US frozen-fish market, is teaming up with an environmental NGO to “ensure the longterm viability of global fish populations and the health of the marine ecosystems on which they depend.”

The move has received great media attention in the UK. A columnist in The Times said that “these last years of the century are giving birth to a new alliance: a type of ruthless, unsentimental, largescale action which entirely bypasses governments. After years of mutual suspicion and tension, the environmentalists and the industrialists, the sandals and the suits, are working things out together...” The Daily Telegraph hailed the MSC as “one of the most significant initiatives to halt fish stocks decline since Iceland went to war over cod in the 1970s.”

Are these claims justified? Perhaps in a situation of monopsony, with Unilever the sole buyer of fish, the MSC may help seal up the global wholesale market. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the real world. The Japanese consumer market for fish, by far the world’s largest, remains totally outside the influence of the Anglo-Dutch giant. So do the retail markets of the ‘Asian Tigers.’

As an initiative to ‘bell’ the market-for long an elusive link in fisheries management-the MSC is welcome, especially if it complements existing

fisheries regulations and instruments. Arguably, fishers who use ecofriendly gear like gill-nets, longlines, traps and pots might benefit from the MSC. If competitive con-

ditions prevail in their domestic markets, they will realize better incomes from ‘green’ fishing operations.

This, however, does not mean that fish thus caught will replace those caught by non-green, ‘dirty’ methods. At best, a niche market for ecoconsumers will develop. Like buying organically grown vegetables, the consumer will be able to choose fish with a ‘green’ stamp. This implies a greater product differentiation in the market, though not the elimination of ‘dirty’ fish. Ultimately, both ‘green’ and ‘dirty’ fish will co-exist. Tampering with only the market mechanism, therefore, will produce only partial results.

If the real interest is the long-term sustainability of marine resources, then more needs to be done. Any measure of sustainability should also include social criteria that reflect the livelihood interests of the majority in fishing communities.

Moreover, it should recognize existing fishing technologies that are selective. The principles of sustainable fisheries ought to be developed through consensus. The MSC should not unfairly penalize fishers who use ‘dirty’ fishing techniques. It should also give them an incentive to switch to ecofriendly methods, with perhaps some kind of income support.

The MSC initiative, however, has not won the total confidence of fishing communities, either in the South or the North, because of their great distrust of Unilever. Many consider the multinational giant to be a wolf in sheep’s garb. To be sure, sustainability may make good business sense, but Unilever could just as well have waited for the sustainability criteria to ripen on its corporate interests. In any case, the idea would have been taken far more seriously by fishworkers’ organizations had WWF consulted them before *It*

Any measure of sustainability should also include social criteria that reflect the livelihood interests of the majority in fishing communities

This editorial comment appeared in Issue No. 15 of SAMUDRA Report, July 1996

It is too early to get overexcited about the MSC or to say if it will actually halt the decline of fish stocks, given that it may finally apply potentially to only about a quarter of global fish production.

As one commentator indicates, the MSC points to the future of fisheries management. So far, such efforts have been lackadaisical. Unless the stakeholders, especially fishworkers, are consulted and encouraged to participate in management programmes, the state and democratic institutions will only get more marginalized through market-led initiatives.

We would like to tether the market and make it more accountable, but we can not view market intervention as the only path to sustainable fisheries. Meanwhile, given the ideologically charged and conflicting stances, it is hardly surprising that both critics and proponents of the MSC are going green about the gills.

It is too early to get overexcited about the MSC or to say if it will actually halt the decline of fish stocks, given that it may finally apply potentially to only about a quarter of global fish production

New hope for marine fisheries

Michael Sutton

A new initiative by Unilever and the World Wide Fund for Nature claims that market incentives will lead to sustainable fishing

The market is replacing our democratic institutions as the key determinant in our society.

—Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Secretary General, United Nations Environment Programme, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 27 October 1995

Two global organizations recently formed a conservation partnership to create market incentives for sustainable fishing by establishing an independent Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the world's largest private, non-profit conservation organization, seeks a new approach to ensure more effective management of marine fisheries. Anglo-Dutch Unilever, a major buyer of frozen fish and manufacturer of the world's best-known frozen-fish products under such brands as Iglo, Birds Eye and Gorton's, is interested in long-term fish stock sustainability to ensure a future for its successful fish business.

World fisheries are in crisis. Fish have never been more popular as seafood, nor more threatened as marine wildlife. On the one hand, the world demand for fish products is steadily rising. On the other hand, scientists warn that fish populations and marine ecosystems are in serious trouble.

The FAO reports that 70 per cent of the world's commercially important marine fish stocks are fully fished, overexploited, depleted or slowly recovering. Nearly everywhere, fisheries that have sustained coastal communities for generations have

suffered catastrophic declines. In some areas, excessive fishing has driven staple species such as Atlantic cod commercially extinct. Clearly, we have exceeded the limits of the seas. To make matters worse, modern fisheries are both heavily subsidized and enormously destructive. Worldwide, governments pay US\$ 54 billion per year in fisheries subsidies to an industry that catches only US\$ 70 billion worth of fish. These payments sustain massive fishing fleets that continue to 'hoover' up fish at an alarming rate. Sophisticated vessels, able to stay at sea for months, seek fisheries farther and farther afield, often in the waters of developing countries, where they compete with local fishers.

Contemporary fishing practices kill and waste an average of 27 million tonnes of fish, sea birds, sea turtles, marine mammals and other ocean life annually fully a third of the global catch. Evidence is mounting that fisheries significantly affect the ocean environment and represent a serious threat to marine biological diversity.

Fishery managers have been unable to prevent the 'mining' of fishery resources. Governments have typically devised politically expedient 'solutions' and then described them as environmentally necessary. These efforts have mostly been too little, too late.

The short term socioeconomic needs of a region's commercial fishing industry has steadfastly resisted change. All too often, political realities compel fishery managers to ignore the implications of the best available science.

Different motivations, but a shared objective: to ensure the long-term viability of global fish populations and the health of the marine ecosystems on which they depend.

Michael Sutton is Director of the Endangered Seas Campaign, WWF – International

Statement of Intent

The Problem

Fish has never been more popular, nor more threatened. Worldwide consumer demand for fish is steadily rising, but scientists warn that fish stocks are in serious decline.

In some areas, excessive fishing has driven staple species such as Atlantic cod commercially extinct. Nearly everywhere, fisheries that have sustained coastal communities for generations have suffered serious declines. Indiscriminate fishing practices kill and waste vast amounts of fish and other marine life annually.

A Global Solution

Two global organizations have committed to tackling this issue. WWF (the world's largest non-profit conservation organization) wants a new approach to ensure more effective management of marine life. Unilever PLC/NV (a major buyer of frozen fish and manufacturer of many of the world's best-known frozen-fish products under such brands as Iglo, Gorton's and Birds Eye UK) is committed to long-term fish stock sustainability to ensure a future for its successful fish business.

Different motivations, but a shared objective: to ensure the long-term viability of global fish populations and the health of the marine ecosystems on which they depend.

How Will This Partnership Work?

The end objective of the partnership between WWF and Unilever is to establish, through consultation, an independent Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) which will create market-led economic incentives for sustainable fishing.

The MSC will be an independent, non-government membership body. It will establish a broad set of principles for sustainable fishing and set standards for individual fisheries. Only fisheries meeting these standards will be eligible for certification by independent, accredited certifying firms.

Products from certified fisheries will eventually be marked with an on-pack logo. This will allow consumers to select those fish products which come from a sustainable source.

Once established, the MSC will be independent of both industry and conservation organizations, and be governed by a board of directors made up of experts from a variety of backgrounds.

The MSC will be modelled on the successful Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), launched by WWF, other conservation groups and timber traders in 1993 to promote a market-led solution towards more sustainable forestry practices around the world.

To create the MSC, WWF and Unilever will contribute matching funds into an extensive scoping exercise to explore how the FSC model can be adapted to meet the specific sustainability needs of global marine fisheries. This study will be undertaken by a number of consultants, coordinated by an independent project manager. It will result in a draft set of founding principles for the MSC.

These draft principles will be generated, by and circulated to a broad spectrum of experts in fisheries-including fishing and industry groups, conservationists, regulators and academics. An open series of national and regional consultations and workshops around the world will then be held to refine and strengthen the principles and agree on a process for international implementation.

WWF and Unilever are committed to supporting the process of agreeing to the principles and establishing the MSC within two years. They will actively seek the widest possible involvement from other organizations in achieving these goals.

(Signed by Dr Robin Pellew, on behalf of WWF International and Antony Burgmans, Director, Unilever PLC/NV)

Politicians, often at the highest levels, frequently intervene in decisions about specific fisheries. Society has simply lacked the political will to forestall the fishing industry's tendency to use up all its resources and thereby destroy itself.

To reverse the fisheries crisis, we must develop long-term solutions that are environmentally necessary and then, through economic incentives, make them politically feasible. Fortunately, an approach is available that has succeeded in other areas: Working in partnership to design and implement market-driven incentives for sustainable fishing.

In order to make this work, the conservation community and progressive members of the seafood industry must forge a strategic alliance. Past experience suggests that building such partnerships and harnessing market forces in favour of conservation can be very powerful. One thing is certain. Where industry and the market lead, governments will likely follow.

In early 1996, WWF and Unilever announced their joint commitment to establish the Marine Stewardship Council within two years. The MSC will be an independent, non-profit, nongovernmental membership body. The organization will establish a broad set of principles for sustainable fishing and set standards for individual fisheries.

Only fisheries meeting these standards will be eligible for certification by independent accredited certifying firms. Seafood companies will be encouraged to join sustainable buyers' groups and make commitments to purchase fish products only from certified sources. Ultimately, products from MSC-certified fisheries will be marked with an on-pack logo.

This will allow seafood consumers to select fish products with the confidence that they come from sustainable, well managed sources.

A project manager will co-ordinate a team of consultants that will work on the development of the MSC. The project team will combine expertise in certification (or ecolabelling) schemes with intimate knowledge of the commercial fishing industry. Team members will consult a broad range of experts representing all stakeholders in marine fisheries.

Together, the team will draft the set of broad principles for sustainable fishing that will underpin the MSC. The team will draw on the standards and guidelines embodied in existing international agreements, such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the UN Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. The team will also enlist new information and expertise in marine conservation biology, economics, seafood marketing, and commercial viability, to help move current thinking forward.

Both organizations, WWF and Unilever, will circulate the results of the scoping exercise and draft principles to a broad spectrum of stakeholders in fisheries: conservationists, fishers, seafood industry officials, fishery managers, lawmakers, etc.

The partners will then sponsor a series of national and regional consultations and workshops around the world. The purpose of these workshops will be to refine and strengthen the principles and develop a process for international implementation. WWF and Unilever are actively seeking the widest possible involvement of other organizations in this exciting initiative.

When Unilever and other major seafood companies make commitments to buy their fish products only from well-managed and MSC-certified fisheries, the fishing industry will be compelled to modify its current practices. Govern-

The MSC has the potential to significantly alter world-wide fishing practices in favour of more sustainable, less destructive fisheries.

We hope these initial steps will stimulate other seafood processors harness market forces and consumer power in favour of healthy, well managed fisheries for the future.

ments, laws and treaties aside, the market itself will begin to determine the means of fish production. Unilever has pledged to source their fishery products only from sustainable, well-managed fisheries certified to MSC standards by the year 2005. As an interim step, the company recently announced that it will cease processing fish oil from European industrial fisheries by April 1997 and re-examine its use of fish oils from other sources.

The massive industrial 'hoovering' of sand eels and other species for fish oil and meal accounts for over half the total North Sea fish catch and affects and retailers to join populations of cod, haddock and sea in the partnership to birds which feed on them. Sainsbury, the UK's largest retail grocery chain, quickly followed Unilever's lead and agreed to phase out the use of fish oil from European sources in 120 product lines.

Whose labels? Whose benefit?

Alain Le Sann

Quality labels certainly have a future-but only if their modus operandi is sufficiently broadbased

Under the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), Unilever and WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) have decided to create a quality label for fish caught under sustainable conditions and practices. This must be viewed as a major landmark for global fisheries and the future development of agricultural and agribusiness activities as a whole. It shows that multinational companies (MNCs) are increasingly aware of conservation principles. Unilever's refusal to henceforth buy oil from the fish-meal oil industry must also be hailed as a decisive step forward.

It is, however, necessary to ponder over some aspects of this new approach. For one thing, it will deal a severe blow to the Danish fleets that specialize in such activity. They have, for long, been criticized by the majority of European fishermen. Though these Danish boats primarily target fish-meal species, they can also catch juveniles of other species. When such by-catches occur on a massive scale, the delicate balance of the food chain in the oceans is upset. At first glance, therefore, the move to control fishing activities is clearly a positive measure for European fisherfolk. However, the joint WWF-Unilever approach raises several questions.

First, the agreement between the powerful MNC and the famous international environmental organization seems to have ignored the fisherpeople, though it is precisely their future which is at stake in this venture.

It may be recalled that the Breton fishermen, who targeted tuna with drift-nets,

were outraged when another environmental group, Greenpeace, campaigned for a ban on that type of gear. These fishermen were, however, able to engage with other organizations in a debate on the matter.

The evolution of the European market, with a bias in favour of industrial fisheries, has been a major factor in the price slump which has affected the welfare of fishermen. With initiatives like the MSC, from now on, environmental movements and MNCs may have a decisive influence not only on prices but also on the conditions that determine access to the market.

On the other hand, fishermen will find it more and more difficult to become masters of their own progress. Unilever and WWF, of course, say they will hold consultations on a broad basis and establish an independent body for the MSC. But it is most likely that certain actors will outweigh others. For instance, fishermen will find it more difficult to promote their case than environmental groups that are well established in the media and thus have an easier task to get their viewpoints across.

The second area of concern is the principles on which the MSC will draw to work out the modalities of such labelling. The joint statement of Unilever and WWF refers to relevant UN documents such as the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. These documents, however, primarily emphasize the environmental aspects of resource management, not the social aspects.

Unilever and WWF of course, say they will hold consultations on a broad basis and establish an independent body for the MSC. But it is most likely that certain actors will outweigh others.

Alain Le Sann is the author of "A Livelihood from Fishing: Globalization and Sustainable Fisheries Policies", published by Intermediate Technology Publications. He is a member of ICSF and presently serves on its Animation Team

... trying to influence fishing practices by introducing new conditions on markets will inevitably lead to a bias in favour of financially sound consumers.

Present European efforts to save resources are based on limiting the number and capacity of vessels, without due consideration for the welfare of fishermen and market conditions. In fact, while the number of boats and fishermen has been decreasing, fishing effort has been increasing. The workload on board fishing vessels is becoming unbearable and accidents have also increased.

In such a context, will social aspects be included in defining ecolabels? In view of the diversity of fishery traditions and situations around the world, attempts to work out principles at a global level will, by nature, face major problems.

Resource management is a complex matter, and fisherpeople must be closely and largely involved in the process. Through moves like the MSC, are we not going to replace a varied, regionalized, participatory approach with standardized principles that will apply uniformly to all the seas and oceans, without paying due attention to specific conditions? Think of the campaign for a ban on drift-nets.

Finally, trying to influence fishing practices by introducing new conditions on markets will inevitably lead to a bias in favour of financially sound consumers. The major markets are in Europe, Japan and the US. Consumers and large producers in these countries will, therefore, impose their views on responsible fisheries.

Promoting imports to countries whose food requirements are already largely met, while simultaneously refusing to address the needs of the more underprivileged countries, does not really exemplify the principles of sustainable development. Are the companies which have embarked on this new ecolabel venture really blameless? Significantly, Unilever promoted the development of large-scale salmon farming. This was

not really in tune with the principles of sustainable development.

If this policy of awarding quality labels to ecofriendly fish is to play a role in promoting responsible fisheries, then there must be wider consultation, with fishermen participating right from the onset of the process.

Such an approach is indeed becoming more and more frequent. For example, hundreds of Breton fishermen have, for the past two years, been furnishing a label for sea breams caught by liners. They have thus been able to take on the competition from farmed sea breams.

To be sure, there is most certainly a future for quality labels. But the central issue remains the decision-making process. Indeed, the whole MSC affair underscores the urgent need for an international fishworkers' organization to work to influence the policies of major environmental and industrial groups.

The mantle of 'going green'

Michael Belliveau

Fishworkers' organizations need to think hard about the merits of associating with corporate environmental ventures

The Anglo-Dutch food giant, Unilever, is going 'green'. It is committing itself to eventually purchasing only fish caught from fisheries certified to be conservation friendly. The fisheries would be certified, or otherwise, by an 'independent' world council being spearheaded by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Unilever.

From a Canadian point of view, the call for 'codes of conduct' and sustainable fishing practices seems to be coming from the very industry people most directly implicated in the devastation of our demersal stocks. The new-found piety and heartfelt concern for the resource is not completely credible and the 'green' mantle seems to be adopted to deflect public rage at what has already occurred, while serving to maintain the perpetrators in the future fishery.

Clearing an ecologically and conservationally sound fishery is eminently sensible and consumers may support such certification. However, I am not sure if Canada's cod fishery would have been so certified even six months before its collapse. And I am sure our herring fishery would be certified at present, even though some inshore fishermen have been virtually eliminated by intense fishing by large purse-seiners. The constituency of inshore and artisanal fishermen faces overwhelming problems, which often arise from the 'industrialized' fleets' inefficient, backward, archaic and other low-level features. So, when the Marine Stewardship Council clears a fishery as sustainable, will it consider the co-option of fishing grounds by 'industrial' fleets at the expense of the small-boat fishers

and their communities? Hardly likely. It will be designated as a political problem and the people at Unilever and WWF selling with disdain and label the public sector as venal, while happily embracing the market as "replacing our democratic institutions as the key determinant in our society."

Goodness knows that there is a need for resource conservation in the marine sector, but fishers in Canada might be excused if they remain sceptical of environmentalists working through the marketplace to save resources.

At present, a herd of grey seals is growing exponentially on the Eastern Scotian shelf. Scientists calculated that they consume up to 80,000 tonnes of infant and juvenile cod each year, while this area of the shelf is under a total fishing moratorium and the prognosis for this particular cod species is the bleakest among all the cod stocks in Atlantic Canada. Yet, whenever a new seal hunt is contemplated for market purposes, the WWF takes out hysterical ads in the national newspapers, decrying such hunts.

I think fishworkers' organizations have enough on their tables simply supporting the organization of inshore fishers. There seems no need to get into some sort of corporatist venture with agribusinesses and world environmentalists.

From a Canadian point of view, the call for 'codes of conduct' and sustainable fishing practices seems to be the 'new hope', will look on governments the 'new hope', will look on governments coming from the very industry people most directly implicated in devastation of our demersal stocks

Michael Belliveau is the Executive Secretary of the Maritime Fishermen's Union, an inshore fishermen's organization based in eastern Canada. He is a founding member of ICSF and presently serves on its Animation Team

A View from the Third World

John Kurien

Under the sanctuary of ‘sustainable fishing’, the MSC could well end up working against the interests of the poor producers of fish

One, therefore, shudders to think of the day when the prediction of Elizabeth Dowdeswell that “the market is replacing our democratic institutions as the key determinant in our society” becomes valid worldwide.

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), a collaboration between Unilever and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), is a case of one giant riding atop another. The resulting behemoth can either make deep impressions on the path it traverses or stumble and crash for lack of balance.

There is, therefore, considerable worldwide interest to see how these two multinational organizations, which, at first sight, seem strange bedfellows, plan to work out a strategy to “ensure the long-term viability of global fish populations and the health of the marine ecosystems on which they depend.”

Congruent to their objectives, both organizations are concerned primarily with the natural resource and the environment—fish and oceans—without necessarily having any intrinsic, longterm interest in either.

For Unilever, all actions must be weighed against its unfeigned pursuit of profits. The corporation is involved in the MSC because it is convinced that sustainable fishing is good business.

For WWF, this is but another specific case of nature conservation taken up in its larger pursuit of mobilizing public appreciation for such issues. It feels it has a winner in the MSC initiative.

For both organizations, the success of this initiative will be a major boost to the ‘markets’ to which they cater, that is, consumers and well-wishers in the First World.

In attempting to respond to the MSC initiative, it is necessary to examine several issues:

- How does one view, from a Third World perspective, an initiative which places all its faith in the magic of the market?
- How should fishworkers’ movements in the Third World, that have been opposing destructive fishing undertaken primarily by fleets fishing for export to the First World, relate to this initiative?
- Will the dynamics of this novel partnership intended to modulate international trade through the use of ecolabels result more in sustainable profits and assured fish consumption (for people and pets) in the First World or will it enhance incomes for fishing communities and ensure adequate protein supplies to needy consumers in the Third World?
- Will this effort be viewed by fish exporting countries in the Third World as creating technical barriers to trade, thus violating free trade rules under the World Trade Organization (WTO)?

In most Third World countries, the market is seen as one of the economic institutions embedded in society. Markets are created for society and not the other way around. One, therefore, shudders to think of the day when the prediction of Elizabeth Dowdeswell that “the market is replacing our democratic institutions as the key determinant in our society” becomes valid worldwide.

John Kurien, a member of ICSF, is an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, India

In democratic institutions, the initial endowments, of the participants are the same. Everybody has one vote. Market institutions are not such levellers. They function on votes which are expressed only in money terms (effective purchasing power), which, as we all know, is hardly distributed equally.

Thus, those who recommend “free markets as the means to efficiency” forget that one of the basic premises of that theory is that economic power is fairly equally distributed among all the participants.

In the Third World, where assets, income and purchasing power are so unequally distributed, this blind faith in the almighty market’s ability to correct all economic and environmental ills is a far cry from the realities which people experience.

Consequently, an initiative which assumes that where the market leads, all else will follow in setting single, generalized standards for an activity undertaken by millions of small producers in diverse circumstances can not be welcomed without cautious circumspection.

The history of unsustainable fishing in Third World tropical waters is closely related to the expansion of the markets in the First World for fish from these waters. Fishing techniques like bottom trawling and purse-seining were imposed in preference to the more seasonal, selective and passive techniques used by artisanal fishworkers. The latter were seen to be ‘less efficient’, since their unit output from the sea was small.

Today, of course, we realize that this was because they were fishing more sustainably and at rates which were in tandem with the natural rates of regeneration of the stocks.

The struggle of fishworkers in Asian countries to ensure a future both for the fish and for themselves, has meant a unilateral opposition to destructive fishing techniques.

They have achieved partial successes and, on the face of it, the MSC initiative need not initially be against their interests. In a sense, much of the talk about sustainable fishing pertains to reverting to, and restoring, this mode of fishing.

Where the contradictions will soon arise pertain to the power that those who buy the fish from these fishworkers will be able to exercise in dictating terms of harvesting and levels of prices.

The nature of the trade linkages and tieups for supply of ‘sustainably harvested’ fish can get to be totally determined from the outside. This could create a complete loss of autonomy for small fishers, with respect to the pattern of harvest and disposal of the produce of their labour.

Even assuming that their harvest may be covered by MSC ecolabels, the consumer price premiums for this may not translate into higher incomes for dispersed producers. Ecolabelling of marine fish must be undertaken with the tacit cooperation of the fishworkers or organizations which represent their marketing chain.

The MSC initiative, by virtue of the fact that it is initiated and funded by Unilever, one of the largest fish buyers in the world, will obviously be anathema to such links and concerns. The corporation’s influence (invisible control) over the MSC initiative will give it a new channel of access to the producers over whom it has had no control until now.

This possibility to make the crucial connection between the realm of production and the realm of sales can also lead to the wiping out of all small-scale commerce which does not fall in line with the product differentiation process sought to be achieved by Unilever in the name of ecolabels for ‘sustainable fishing.’

In the Third World, where assets, income and purchasing power are so unequally distributed, this blind faith in the almighty market’s ability to correct all economic and environmental ills is a far cry from the realities which interests, and not through the lower-level people experience.

Pressure must be exerted to ensure governmental involvement in fostering this nexus, on the premise that sustainable harvesting and sustainable consumption are necessary prerequisites for sustainable trade in which all governments have a high stake.

With this achieved, Unilever will retain a quasi-monopoly control over a large segment of the market and can then set the environmental standards it likes and dictate the prices it wants, both at the consumer and the producer end.

Additionally, through the MSC initiative, Unilever will have enormous control over information on fish harvesting processes and effects on ocean environment which it can command and disseminate to its advantage in a wide variety of ways. This will further sully the minds of First World consumers because they have been led to believe by the MSC initiative that buying Unilever brands is the sure way to save the fish and oceans.

In such a market context dominated by one multinational merchant wielding enormous influence on economic and non-economic factors, prices will be set to achieve a high rate of profit. They can not be treated as revealing the 'true' economic significance of goods or reflect the preferences of 'end consumers.'

The only way for fishworkers' movements to stall this dynamic will be to take the initiative of sustainable harvesting methods on to their own turf, at their own pace and terms. They also need to link with consumer movements in the major consumption countries to foster greater direct trade between organized groups of fishworkers from the Third World and consumer-based institutions in the First World which are not merely concerned with consumption per se but also with reassessing lifestyles as well as their own patterns of consumption.

Pressure must be exerted to ensure governmental involvement in fostering this nexus, on the premise that sustainable harvesting and sustainable consumption are necessary prerequisites for sustainable trade in which all governments have a high stake. Making the MSC ini-

tiative recognize this would be an important criteria for fishworkers' organizations to extend selective support to it.

On the question of the MSC's role in supplying protein for the poor, we are confronted with the classic chicken and egg dilemma. Which came first unsustainable fishing or unsustainable fish consumption? And which do we tackle first? Behind all boom-and-bust fishery histories of the Third World (and the First World too) lie the attraction and power of strong and usually distant consumption centres to which fish flow after they are harvested.

The consumers are not necessarily people. They may be pets or animals. The point, however, is that they have greater purchasing power than needy people closer to the centres of harvesting. For example, a fact rarely highlighted in the boom-and-bust story of the Peruvian anchovy fishery is that children in coastal Peru suffer malnutrition and blindness due to lack of proteins and vitamin A, while the anchovy is fed to pigs and cattle in the US and Europe. Will introducing passive fishing techniques and providing ecolabels to fishmeal made from fish so harvested, address this issue?

As consumers, First World citizens need to be convinced and educated that the answer to the above question is in the negative. If they really wish to play a crucial role in halting natural resource depletion and environmental destruction around the world, it will necessarily have to be through less consumption and a greater emphasis on consumption closer to the point of production.

The easy option of buying products ecolabelled by multinationals, without the participation and sanction of the distant producer, is but a sophisticated technique of product and market differentiation masquerading as sustainability.

Since marine fish form an important component in the basket of easily exportable commodities, Third World governments are unlikely to take to this MSC initiative with open hands. The recent efforts by the US to unilaterally impose turtle excluding devices (TEDs) on trawls as a prerequisite for import of shrimp from India created a furore which prompted the government and the industry to consider appealing to the WTO's provisions on technical barriers to trade. Though many environmentalists and academics in India—myself included—are against trawling, they saw the US initiative as another case of US environmental imperialism, which, to them, was a greater enemy.

Clearly, efforts to impose environmental standards of the First World using 'nonmarket' methods, which then provide obvious advantages to the trade and consumers of the First World alone, will be resisted, however strong and sensible the environmental logic of the initiative may be.

A global initiative to achieve sustainable fishing needs to be far more broadbased, with the participatory support of fish producers, the processing industry, governments and the consumers. Such initiatives cannot be left to the market", nor do they "just happen." They have to be carefully crafted. To the extent that the MSC attempts to make a beginning in this direction, it merits the careful attention of all the fisheries' stakeholders not involved in it.

Given Unilever's economic power and the opinion mobilizing skills of WWF, it would be naive to brush aside this initiative as a non-starter. It is often said with confidence that "where industry and the market lead, governments will likely follow." What is still not sure, however, is whether the people—the millions all over the world who, on sea and land, toil to harvest and process fish—will obey. Herein lies the weakness of the MSC initiative and, ironically, the strength of the mil-

lions, whose food and livelihood depend on fish and the oceans, to reject the initiative or shape it to their priorities.

A global initiative to achieve sustainable fishing needs to be far more broadbased, with the participatory support of fish producers, the processing industry, governments and the consumers. Such initiatives cannot be "left to the market nor do they "just happen.

A Powerful arrow in the quiver

Michael Sutton and Caroline Whitfield

The MSC initiative is going ahead with its plans to harness market forces and consumer power to tackle the Global crisis in fisheries

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Unilever have been carrying out an international programme of preliminary consultations with interested groups of stakeholders.

The several articles and the editorial on the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) initiative that appeared in the last issue of SAMUDRA marked the beginning of a thoughtful and important dialogue with a significant group of stakeholders in marine fisheries.

The timing of this discussion could not have been better, as the MSC initiative is in the early stages of its evolution. Much of the useful feedback provided by the SAMUDRA writers has proven extremely valuable to the sponsors of the initiative. A great deal of progress has been made on the development of the MSC since the publication of the last issue of SAMUDRA. A brief update might help address some of the substantive and procedural issues that were raised by the SAMUDRA commentators.

In September, the MSC initiative sponsored the first in a series of international workshops and consultations to discuss the development of principles and criteria for sustainable fishing that will eventually underpin the MSC. This workshop, held in Bagshot, UK, was attended by an international panel of fisheries experts. The panel suggested that a sustainable fishery should be based upon:

- the maintenance of the integrity of ecosystems;
- the maintenance, and re-establishment of healthy populations of targeted species;
- the development and maintenance of effective fisheries management

systems, taking into account all relevant biological, technological, economic social environmental and commercial aspects; and compliance with relevant international, national and local laws and standards.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Unilever have been carrying out an international programme of preliminary consultations with interested groups of stakeholders. Staff have attended seafood shows and fishing expos worldwide.

Recently, WWF and Unilever were invited to present the MSC initiative at annual meetings of the National Fisheries Institute (the largest association of seafood processors in North America) in Seattle, the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (representing fishing industry associations from 12 countries) in Seoul, the Groundfish Forum (the major groundfish quota holders) in London, and the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Montreal.

In addition, staff briefed the Seafish Industry Authority in the UK, at a meeting in Copenhagen of industry and government officials from all Scandinavian countries, and the World Bank's Environment Division in Washington, DC. The latter is considering launching a Market Transformation Initiative based on the MSC initiative. Other interested parties who will soon be briefed include the United Nations Development Programme and the EU Fisheries Commissioner, Emma Bonino. The sponsors of the MSC initiative are also planning a worldwide series of workshops and

Mike Sutton is Director, Endangered Seas Campaign, WWF International, and Caroline Whitfield is International Manager, Fish Innovation Centre, Unilever

consultations during the remainder of 1996 and 1997. The purpose of these workshops will be to introduce the MSC initiative to diverse stakeholders around the world, seek inputs and feedback on the emerging draft principles and criteria for sustainable fishing, and solicit the involvement of all stakeholders in marine fisheries.

Interested parties are encouraged to contact one of the sponsoring organizations in order to register their interest in this process. WWF and Unilever retained Coopers and Lybrand, the international consulting firm, to develop an organizational blueprint and implementation plan for the MSC.

Coopers and Lybrand is a world leader in organizational design, and the sponsors of the initiative sought the firm's professional advice from the outset. Its staff interviewed a wide range of stakeholders, over the past several months, from all parts of the world. They also conducted detailed comparative studies of certification organizations, such as the Forest Stewardship Council, in order to learn from their mistakes and successes. At the time of writing this. Coopers and Lybrand's report is still forthcoming.

WWF and Unilever also retained an executive recruiting firm to conduct a worldwide search for a senior project manager to lead the development of the MSC. The response was overwhelming: more than 400 applications were received from fisheries professionals around the world. That by itself was a sign that many involved in fisheries today are seeking a new approach, and looking hopefully to the MSC initiative to provide leadership. The search is in its final stages, and an announcement of the person who will be appointed to take the MSC from idea to reality, is expected before the end of the current year.

Present plans call for the MSC to be formally created as an independent entity in

early 1997, when the project manager begins work. This appointment will be followed by a search for a board chair and they will begin shaping the organization, guided by the advice received from Coopers and Lybrand and the regional workshops.

The initiative will be looking for individuals of the highest calibre to serve as board members, who can bring vision and new thinking to help shape the way market forces can be harnessed to promote sustainable fishing.

Funding for the MSC initiative and the organization itself will be from independent sources such as private foundations. The World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme have indicated their preliminary interest in the initiative, and a fundraising drive is under way to capitalize on the initiative.

An important characteristic of the MSC will be its independence from both the environmental community and the industry. Finding a way to harness market forces and consumer power in appropriate ways to help resolve the crisis in marine fisheries may not be the only arrow in the quiver of marine conservation, but it could well be a powerful one.

Our challenge is to ensure that this participation of all SAMUDRA readers in this exciting effort.

An important characteristic of the MSC will be its independence from both the environmental community and the industry. Finding a way to harness market forces and consumer power in appropriate ways to help resolve the crisis in marine fisheries may not be the only arrow in the quiver of marine conservation, but it could well be a powerful one.

Cut adrift

Barbara L. Neis

The MSC initiative can be criticised from the perspective of fishery-dependent women of the North

The MSC picture ignores the complex realities of women's consumption work, its diversity and the differing places they occupy in fish product markets.

"...Women should come together as one and not leave the decision-making and planning to the men... If women made some of the decisions, there would be more employment and better programmes in place for women in rural communities."

— a Newfoundland fisherwoman

Throughout the world, the relationships of men and women to fisheries resources, work and wealth differ. Although important cultural and class differences exist, women depend on those resources for food, work, income and identity. Yet they tend to have less control than men over these resources and the associated wealth.

Despite these realities, initiatives in fisheries management and fisheries conservation are rarely scrutinized for their potential impacts on women. The proposal for a Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) developed by the environmental transnational, the World Wide Fund for Nature, and the giant corporate transnational, Unilever, shares this weakness.

The assumptions upon which it is based are flawed, and there are ways in which it might negatively impact women of the North (and South) and, indeed, the fish stocks themselves.

The proposed MSC will consist of an appointed team of 'experts' who will certify fisheries as sustainable and then encourage seafood companies to join groups of sustainable buyers, purchase fish only from these sources, and market such fish with an ecolabel. Con-

sumer demand will presumably provide the major incentive for corporations and, ultimately, governments to participate in the process of developing sustainable fisheries.

At first glance, the MSC proposal might be interpreted as a feminist initiative. Due to their continued responsibility for shopping, food production and service in the home, the MSC proposal appears to position women so that they could have an unprecedented impact on the fate of the world's fishery resources.

Guided by expert advice and progressive corporate initiatives, women's choices could restructure the world's fisheries in the direction of sustainability.

However, there are some things wrong with this picture. There is definitely a need for greater public scrutiny of fisheries management and corporate behaviour within the fisheries sector. One way to achieve such scrutiny is through consumer education. However, education is only one factor that influences consumption.

The MSC picture ignores the complex realities of women's consumption work, its diversity and the differing places they occupy in fish product markets. For example, women in different parts of the world consume different fish products, in different contexts, and they acquire these resources in different ways.

Rich women and poor women, urban women and women in fishery-dependent communities do not all consume fish in

Barbara L. Neis works in the Department of Sociology, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

the same manner. One way to scrutinize the implications of the proposed MSC, then, is to examine its potential impacts on access to fish for consumption among these different groups of women.

It seems probable that women of the North (and in South-east Asia) will be more likely to consume fish that is ecolabelled than women of the South. I say this because ecolabelling will do nothing to reduce the cost of fish and might actually increase its cost—already a barrier for women of the South and poor women of the North.

This will happen also because women of the North, particularly urban, wealthy women, are more likely to consume processed fish purchased in large supermarkets, where packaging and labelling exist.

If, as John Kurien has suggested (SAMUDRA No. 15), ecolabelling actually promotes the export of fish products by fuelling consumer demand in a context of resource scarcity women consumers in the North could unknowingly contribute to reduced food self sufficiency and reduced economic power among women in the South as well as among women in fishery-dependent regions in the North.

In his article promoting the MSC (SAMUDRA No. 15), Michael Sutton argues that the MSC will put the market in the lead and “where the market leads, governments will likely follow.” In the North, the emphasis on fish exports is being combined with the introduction of management initiatives like Individual Transferable Quotas.

These moves are drastically limiting the access of men, and particularly women, in fishery-dependent communities to those fish resources that remain. The combined impact of these initiatives and the increase in exports of fish seems to arise from the growing political commitment to the export markets and those who depend upon them, and the declining com-

mitment to those in fishery regions who experience the cumulative effects of displacement from the industry and loss of access to fish for subsistence.

Women and men need to carefully scrutinize Sutton’s endorsement of the claim that “markets are replacing our democratic institutions as the key determinant in our society.” While this may be happening, it is not something that we should necessarily support.

As argued by Czerny, Swift and Clarke, in *Getting Started on Social Analysis in Canada*, if the market is a democracy, it is a democracy in which some have more votes than others, and in which, although consumers can vote, they have little control over who or what they vote for. Poor women are particularly powerless, democracy, democracy in which marketplace.

Vertically integrated food conglomerates are increasingly the primary consumers of fish products. These conglomerates actually have the most votes in the marketplace for fish products. When we recognize that the producers are often also the consumers, what does this tell us about the MSC initiative?

Particularly in the North, fish is often consumed in restaurants and fast food outlets or in the form of products whose growth has been enhanced by the use of fishmeal and fish oils. A company might commit itself to use only fish from certified harvesting sectors, but will the ecolabelling process follow this fish from the vessel through processing, manufacturing, preparation and service to the consumer?

For example, will restaurants be certified? Will meat products grown using fish oil from sustainable fisheries be labelled at the counter or at the restaurant table? If they are, how will the validity of this certification be ensured? Who will police the corporations and how will they do this? At what cost?

... if the market is a it is a partly because they have few votes in the some have more votes than others, and in which, although consumers can vote, they have little control over who or what they vote for.

A full discussion of the implications of the proposed MSC for women of the North needs to look not only at women as consumers of 'fish products, but also at women who depend on fishery resources for employment, culture and community.

Are there other ways to spend this money that might be more effective at promoting sustainable fisheries? Why not ask some women what they think?

If, in our proposals for sustainable fisheries, we do not include differences in voting power within the market and differences in control over products available for purchase, we could end up blaming stock collapses on consumers. The most probable target would be those increasing numbers of poor consumers, primarily women, whose purchases are dictated by low incomes and who, therefore, can not always afford to distinguish between fish products on the basis of ecolabelling.

This blame would be misplaced because it overstates the power of these women and also because it ignores the reality that the poor (both in the North and the South) consume relatively little protein compared to the rich, and the protein they consume is more likely to be a byproduct of protein production for the wealthy than the primary source of demand. In a world where wild fish resources (like other natural resources) are limited, the problem is not just what fish we eat, but also how much we eat and in what form.

A full discussion of the implications of the proposed MSC for women of the North needs to look not only at women as consumers of fish products, but also at women who depend on fishery resources for employment, culture and community.

The household basis of fisheries in Atlantic Canada, Norway and many other parts of the North is well documented. Women contribute directly to these fisheries as workers, organizers and managers, in fishery households, industries and communities. They have fishery knowledge and skills, and depend on fish resources and industries for their livelihoods and, to some extent, for self-sufficiency in food.

The moratoriums on groundfish in Atlantic Canada have demonstrated the profoundly negative impacts resource degradation can have on these women. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the area of Atlantic Canada hardest hit by the collapse of the cod stocks, about 12,000 women lost jobs in the industry. The crisis also affected women doing unpaid work in their husbands' -fishing enterprises, such as bookkeeping, supplying and cooking for crews.

Other women lost work in child care and the retail sector in fishery-dependent communities. In addition, out migration and government cutbacks are reducing the number of women employed in education, health and social services. As workers, wives and mothers who are rooted in their local communities, these women have a vested interests in sustainable fisheries.

When looked at from the perspective of these and other fishery-dependent women of the North, the underlying assumptions of Sutton's arguments for an MSC are extremely problematic. Sutton is correct in his argument that global fish stocks are in trouble.

However, his explanation for these problems is more difficult to defend. He implies that the cause of these problems, particularly in the North, is too much democracy: governments have been unwilling to take the decisions necessary to prevent overfishing, due to political pressure from a fishing industry driven to use up resources and destroy itself. Women in fishery communities do not seem to share this perception that the roots of resource degradation lie in **too much** democracy.

In the case of Atlantic Canada and Norway, for example, they feel that decisions about the fishery, past and present, have been made by people who are not familiar with the strengths and needs of rural communities and, more specifically, with the needs of women. They

also feel that without the knowledge and the support of local people, development efforts as well as initiatives to create sustainable fisheries will not succeed.

If Sutton's diagnosis of the causes of global overfishing is incorrect, so is his solution. There is no guarantee that the proposed MSC will remove politics from fisheries management. The process of defining 'expertise' has political dimensions, as does the process of defining sustainable fishing. In his book *Fishing for Truth*, for example, Finlayson has shown that data from small-scale fishers were underutilized by fisheries scientists in Newfoundland, Canada because of dissimilarities in the rules, norms and language of these fishers and those of scientists.

Elsewhere, I have shown how latent biases towards the offshore trawler fishery in the science of stock assessment in Newfoundland became evident when this science was examined from the perspective of small-scale, inshore fishers. I have also argued that small-scale fishers' knowledge poses problems for fisheries science and management that are similar to those posed by the ecosystem itself. This is, perhaps, even more true of the knowledge of fishery dependent women.

If the expertise of male fishers is marginalized within fisheries science and management enterprises in the countries of the North, that of female fishers and fishworkers is excluded.

Women in fishery households must bridge the growing gap between the costs of fishing and the value of landings that occur when resources are mismanaged. Women processing workers get less work.

However, when these women attempt to draw upon their knowledge and experience to influence fisheries policy, as happened in Norway during the cod moratorium, the integrative nature of that knowledge (rooted in links between ecology, household, work, markets and communi-

ties) makes it difficult for managers to grasp.

As argued by Siri Gerrard, the perception that such knowledge represents particular interests, whereas scientific knowledge is objective, contributes to this marginalization by according science a greater power.

In Sutton's account, fisheries-dependent women are not explicitly identified among the stakeholders whom the MSC could consult in formulating its standards and principles for sustainable fishing. Shifting decisions on fisheries management from elected governments to an MSC with no clear accountability to fishery communities will augment existing limits on democracy located in the political sphere and in the market, and further erode women's power. In so doing, it will undermine the potential for sustainable fisheries.

The marginalization of women's knowledge and experience will persist despite women's continued responsibility for child care, which may enhance their commitment to ensuring that resources are managed in such a way as to protect future generations-one requirement for sustainable development.

A second requirement for sustainability that is not explicitly identified in the MSC proposal is the need to reduce inequities, including gender-related ones, within the current generation. James Boyce has outlined the "intimate ties between environmental degradation and the distribution of wealth and power."

Economic inequities and not too much democracy are primarily responsible for overfishing in countries of the North and the South. The wealthy tend to benefit more than the poor from overfishing and the willingness to pay the costs associated with sustainable fishing is constrained by the ability to pay

A second requirement for sustainability that is not explicitly identified in the MSC proposal is the need to reduce inequities, including gender-related ones, within the current generation.

Ecolabelling could, ironically, undermine the sustainability of precisely those fisheries it identifies as adequately managed.

In politics and in the market, wealth speaks louder than poverty. In Canada, cuts to social and other programmes designed to redistribute wealth from wealthy to poorer, fishery-dependent areas of the country, and from men to women, are exacerbating economic inequities at the same time as those vulnerable to these cuts are reeling from the effects of resource degradation. An initiative like the MSC that proposes to create sustainable fisheries without addressing these deepening economic inequities will not be effective. As women tend to be poorer than men, and exercise less control over natural resources and within politics, it is probable that they will suffer most from this failure.

A second requirement for sustainability that is not explicitly identified in the MSC proposal is the need to reduce inequities, including gender related ones, within the current generation.

Ecolabelling could, ironically, undermine the sustainability of precisely those fisheries it identifies as adequately managed.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the potential negative impacts of the MSC will be offset by gains in fishery sustainability. Ecolabelling could, ironically, undermine the sustainability of precisely those fisheries it identifies as adequately managed.

There are a number of reasons for believing this might be the case. The collapse of the groundfish stocks of Atlantic Canada has shown that there is enormous scientific uncertainty regarding the dynamics and status of wild fish stocks.

In addition, most commercial stocks are already overexploited; there is an arsenal of underutilized fishing vessels available to target those stocks for which there is a strong demand; and the national and international mechanisms

for preventing the diversion of fishing effort from one fishery to another are extremely weak.

Defining some fisheries as sustainable and promoting the market for them will prompt increased pressure on those stocks. Not only will this be difficult to control but the effects of it will also be difficult to monitor.

In short, winning the ecolabel prize could be the equivalent of a death sentence for those fisheries and for the communities that depend upon them.

Who's being seduced?

Brian O'Riordan

As the Marine Stewardship Council tries to sell itself in the South, critics are starting to question its market orientation

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is trying to tackle an issue of global concern: the sustainable use of fishery resources for the benefit of current and future generations.

As part of the process of setting up the MSC, 'Principles and Criteria' are being established and developed for sustainable fishing. These will eventually provide the logic for a certifying scheme that will be used to qualify (or disqualify) fisheries products for the MSC ecolabel. This aspect of the MSC has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the whole sustainability debate, and is to be welcomed.

The process of consultation being undertaken by the MSC project in devising and developing its Principles and Criteria is being conducted in an extremely open and transparent manner. The project is seeking to consult with, and be guided by, the views of as many stakeholders in the, fisheries sector as possible. This is also a very positive aspect of the project and is proving to be highly successful in stimulating debate.

However, of considerable concern to many people is, that the MSC is based on a Northern-driven neoliberal agenda. According to Carl-Christian Schmidt, the recently appointed Project Manager of the MSC, "Ecolabelling is a neoliberal tool and the MSC is going down that path."

From a neoliberal market perspective, livelihoods and cultural traditions are no different from consumer durables like cars, and, as such, can be valued and traded. In the neoliberal marketplace, sell-

ing your fish quota (and your livelihood from fishing) is no different from selling your car.

Yet, it is likely that it will be the trading interests, like supermarket chains and retail outlets, which will support the MSC, and determine whether or not fish with MSC ecolabels become popular consumer items. In the UK, supermarkets account for around 60 per cent of fresh fish and 80 per cent of frozen fish sales.

These stores, conscious of their public image and their market shares, will be the ones to welcome the MSC ecolabelling scheme, not consumers themselves. The MSC's interest in the South would seem to be mainly as a source of fish products which could be accredited. Fish sporting the MSC label will only be marketed in the North. It is unlikely that they will be sold in the South.

On 8 May, Schmidt, Julia Novy, the consultant recently appointed to help the MSC devise its strategy for the South, and several key people from WWF and Unilever hosted a 'Less Developed Countries Workshop' in London. The agenda included three key questions: Who are the relevant stakeholders? What are the key issues facing the introduction of the MSC in developing countries? What should be the strategy and action plan for the MSC in developing countries?

Of the 12 participants, six were WWF, Unilever and MSC staffers. Except for a participant from Papua New Guinea,

However, of considerable concern to many people is, that the MSC is based on a Northern-driven neoliberal agenda

Brian O'Riordan, Fisheries Adviser to the Intermediate Technology Development Group, UK, is also a member of ICSF

Small-scale, decentralized, community-based fisheries, prevalent in the South, might be discriminated against, because they would not be able to buy into the MSC certification scheme.

the rest were from a variety of UK NGOs and consultancy firms with interests in the South.

Laura Cooper of the WWF's Endangered Seas Campaign explained that, as far as the South is concerned, the application of the MSC to developing countries was being put off until after the core programme was established.

"We know we don't know how to do it right (in the South), we know we need to ask a lot of questions," she said, adding that the workshop and subsequent consultations were designed "to put them in touch with the people who they need to be in touch with."

Schmidt clarified that the MSC would be limited to taking a "slice of the fisheries sector. "The MSC might set right some, but not all, wrongs. "We are living in a second-best world and have to apply second-best solutions," he said.

MSC accreditation will require participants to buy into the certification scheme by paying for accreditation and subsequent monitoring. Smaller fleets of large ships able to offer bulk supplies will have an advantage over larger fleets of small vessels whose supplies may fluctuate. Small-scale, decentralized, community based fisheries, prevalent in the South, might be discriminated against, because they would not be able to buy into the MSC certification scheme. It could also prove too costly for MSC certifying agents to accredit the many small-scale, decentralized fisheries. The MSC may thus favour more centralized, company owned fishing operations.

As the process of developing the MSC Principles and Criteria advances, boundaries will need to be drawn around what the MSC includes and what it excludes. This may mean that environmental and technical factors will be the main determining criteria for

accreditation, while social factors may be pushed into the background.

Although the MSC deals with inter-generational, not allocation, issues, fisheries where allocation issues are resolved through privatization (for example, through management systems based on individual transferable quotas) will be easier to certify. It will also be easier for the MSC to certify fisheries on scientific evidence, than on more socially based traditional knowledge systems. In the fisheries of developing countries, traditional community-based resource allocation systems and socially based management systems are widespread but not widely recognized or acknowledged. With its scientific and technical bias, will the MSC discriminate against these?

The question of exporting a Northern agenda to the South is also a major issue for many people, who see the MSC as Northern neocolonialism in another guise. There are many in the South who do not share the North-devised neoliberal agenda on which the MSC is based, and who would, therefore oppose its imposition. There are also many who feel that the North should rather be questioning and regulating its own patterns of consumption, rather than let consumerism drive its citizens' lives.

Clearly, there is a lot of work to be done before the MSC will be fully up and running. According to Schmidt, it should be completely independent and functional by end 1998. Given this tight deadline and its inherent partiality, how serious can the MSC initiative be as a tool to encourage long-term sustainability, as opposed to being just another short-term marketing gimmick?

Don't be harsh on the MSC

Laura Cooper

Both fishing communities and consumers have much to gain from the recent MSC initiative, says a former fisher

As a former fisher, I disagree with the conclusion drawn by Barbara Neis in her article 'Cut Adrift' (SAMUDRA, November 1996), which analyzes the potential impacts of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) initiative. Although Neis points out many of the possible benefits of the MSC, she concludes that this initiative, designed to harness market forces to promote sustainable fishing, disenfranchises women and is 'the equivalent of a death sentence for (sic) fisheries and communities that depend upon them.'

The basic fallacy in Neis's prediction of the MSC's impacts is the assumption that fisheries are static and that any programme designed to have an impact on fisheries must address all current inequities associated with fisheries. The state of fisheries worldwide is not static. Global fish catches have increased 500 per cent in the last 40 years. Fishing communities such as those on the Atlantic coast of Canada and America are already in jeopardy or have collapsed, as have some fish stocks. The social costs of mismanagement are severe; overfishing ruins communities and wrecks the lives of women, men and children.

Fisheries are complex and multidimensional, encompassing biological, environmental, social and economic factors, and scientific uncertainty. The MSC, in developing criteria to evaluate the sustainability of fisheries, is taking these factors into account. The mission of the MSC is to work for sustainable marine fisheries by promoting responsible, environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable fishing practices.

However, the MSC is not a panacea for our worldwide fisheries crisis. It is designed to provide consumers with a more direct way of promoting sustainability in fisheries through market forces, so that women, men and children may rely on healthy supplies of fish in the future. It is not designed to replace existing democratic institutions, which should be encouraged to promote sustainability, and, for that matter, social equality.

As an individual who has fished for a living, I am intimately aware of the shortcomings of modern fisheries management and applaud a programme designed to promote sustainable fishing practices for the benefit of the resource and those who depend upon it.

As a consumer, I support a mechanism allowing consumers to have a more direct impact on fisheries management through the market place. I encourage all of those in fishing communities, women and men alike, who have so much to lose from overfishing and mismanagement, and so much to gain from conservation and sustainability, to support the Marine Stewardship Council.

As a consumer, I support a mechanism allowing consumers to have a more direct impact on fisheries management through the market place.

Laura Cooper, an exfisher from Alaska, US, is now the International Programme Officer of WWF's Endangered Seas Campaign

Open and transparent

Carl-Christian Schmidt

The certification procedure of the MSC initiative seeks to involve the many and different stakeholders in fisheries

One very important aspect of ecolabelling is that, when applied on a voluntary basis, they are market neutral and nondiscriminatory.

I refer to the article by Brian O’Riordan entitled ‘Who’s Being Seduced?’, which appeared in the July issue of SAMUDRA. I would like to clarify a number of points related to the MSC certification which is currently still being developed.

Firstly, I was happy to see that Brian’s article began on a positive note for the MSC. I fully agree with him when he underlines MSC’s potentially valuable contribution towards sustainable fisheries. I was also very pleased to learn that Brian approved of the consultation process which we are currently undertaking and I can confirm that the consultation process is both open and transparent. We are doing our utmost to get as many stakeholders around the world involved in designing the MSC certification programme.

In addition, we are currently field-testing the Marine Stewardship Council’s proposed certification system in various fisheries settings. These test cases include small-scale fisheries as well as fisheries in the developing world. We hope that these test cases will provide valuable information on the MSC’s Principles and Criteria and the certification methodology, and will help guide future development.

These test cases should provide information on the costs of certification, the feasibility of the proposed standard and methodology in a real fisheries setting and also highlight how the certifiers work in this sector, which is new to most of them. Our resources are, of course, not unlimited, so we do our utmost to get the best value for the money that

has been allocated for the development of the MSC.

There are various reasons why ecolabelling systems (by no means confined to the proposed MSC certification) have taken off in recent years. One very important aspect of ecolabelling is that, when applied on a voluntary basis, they are market-neutral and non-discriminatory. In this respect, it should be noted that the success of a voluntary scheme, as is the case for the MSC, will, at the end of the day, be judged by the level of take-up from industry.

The voluntary nature of the MSC scheme ensures that it will not be ‘imposed’ on anyone. Rather, the consumers (final or intermediate) are being alerted to the environmental consequences of their consumption.

This is an attempt to address the devastating effects that consumption from certain fisheries may have. In this way, the proposal that “the North should rather be questioning and regulating its own patterns of consumption” is definitely very much in line with MSC thinking, but by means of a voluntary scheme rather than one which is ‘regulated’.

Brian’s article notes that privatized fisheries (e.g. ITQs) will be easier to certify. At present, there is no evidence to substantiate this proposition nor is there any intention to discriminate against any particular fisheries management system. The test cases mentioned above may, however, shed some light on these issues.

Carl-Christian Schmidt is Project Manager of the Marine Stewardship Council. This letter was addressed to Sebastian Mathew, Executive Secretary of ICSF, with a copy to Brian O’Riordan of ITDG

The global applicability or equivalence of a scheme like the MSC's is vital. For a better understanding of how this can be achieved with a general set of principles and criteria (or standards) against which certification takes place, it should be remembered that the relative importance of indicators (measures for each of the principles and criteria) will be fisheries specific. That is why we have consistently stressed that the certification procedure / methodology is at least as important as the set of principles and criteria which, unfortunately, seems to be what attracts most attention.

Contrary to 'normal' certifications where the measurements are fairly straightforward and can be addressed as a set of yes/no questions and answers, certification as proposed by the MSC will be less straightforward.

Under the MSC system, the certification companies will set up certification teams which will consist of people with relevant knowledge about the local/ regional fisheries situation and have the 'approval' of stakeholder groups. This will ensure the credibility of the certification outcome and that the certification process will take into account the local/regional fisheries conditions and settings.

Let me finally mention that the latest OECD fisheries publication, *Towards Sustainable Fisheries*, which, *inter alia*, analyses community-based fisheries management systems, comes to a very positive conclusion with respect to achieving sustainability objectives through such schemes.

In fact, in the many fisheries meetings and discussions I have attended in recent years, co-management and communitybased systems are often highlighted as being among the best means of ensuring socially and economically acceptable outcomes for those who rely on fishing, and, by the same token, also the future of the resource.

Under the MSC system, the certification companies will set up certification teams which will consist of people with relevant knowledge about the local/regional fisheries situation and have the 'approval' of stakeholder groups.

An appeal for co-operation

Michael Sutton

The Marine Stewardship Council initiative will succeed only if it enlists the support of the wide array of stakeholders in fisheries

The fact that Unilever, one of the world's leading buyers of fish, and other key industry players are cooperating in the development of the MSC seems only to have deepened your mistrust. My mission is to turn that thinking on its head and persuade you that the MSC is worthy not only of your trust but your active participation.

I received your note on my return from Cape Town, where we held the seventh in our first round of regional workshops on the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). The discussion there was most interesting, especially from the perspective of native South African fishers represented by the Informal Fisheries Association. They felt that the MSC, by promoting socially responsible fisheries, would help them advance the interests of small-scale, local fishers who have heretofore been disenfranchised by the South African government Fishworkers in other parts of the world have had a similar reaction to the MSC.

With that in mind, I have to say that I've been very disappointed in your apparent unwillingness to help us develop the MSC with the interests of fishworkers at heart. ICSF seems to believe that any market-based mechanism such as the MSC will necessarily favour large-scale, Northern fisheries and their sophisticated management systems. You seem to have concluded that the MSC will work against the interests of small-scale fishers, especially in the developing world. The fact that Unilever, one of the world's leading buyers of fish, and other key industry players are co-operating in the development of the MSC seems only to have deepened your mistrust.

My mission is to turn that thinking on its head and persuade you that the MSC is worthy not only of your trust but your active participation. Let me start by making a few salient points about the evolution of the MSC in relation to the

fisheries work of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

1. In 1995, WWF launched the Endangered Seas Campaign in response to the accelerating decline of marine fisheries around the world. Our goal is to reverse the effects of unsustainable fishing on marine fish and the environment on which they depend. One of our targets is to build powerful social and economic incentives for sustainable fishing that will complement existing regulatory regimes.

2. We recognized early on that the rich fishery resources of developing countries are increasingly under threat from the distant-water fleets of Northern, developed States. The FAO reported earlier this year that "in most low-income food-deficit countries, production has changed little over recent years, and, in some of ' them, it has dropped considerably" As you know, a leading cause of this decline has been the activity of offshore fleets that compete with local fishers for dwindling resources.

3. To make matters worse, many Northern governments heavily subsidize their fishing fleets. This is particularly true of the European Union. Having long since overfished their own waters, these countries export their excess fishing capacity to the waters of some of the world's poorest nations. That Northern governments subsidize overfishing in developing countries is one of the most scandalous aspects of modern fisheries.

4. WWF is addressing unsustainable fishing on a number of fronts: in our field

and policy work, and in both public and private sectors. Our field offices around the world are focusing more and more on fisheries and the marine environment. For example, last week our affiliate in Thailand (Wildlife Fund Thailand) issued a call for action in the shooting death of an official of the Small-Scale Fishermen's Network of Phang Nga Bay by the crew of an offshore trawler. There are many similar examples of our work on behalf of local communities from our field offices around the world.

5. Meanwhile, we are working in the public policy sector to eliminate or redirect the subsidies that send the wrong economic signals to world fisheries. We recently published a report entitled 'Subsidies and the Depletion of World Fisheries' that highlights this problem. Among the four case studies in the report is one by Gareth Porter of the World Bank featuring the impacts of EU fisheries agreements with African States. We released this report in early June at a joint news conference and workshop in Geneva co-sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme. The conclusions of the workshop and the publicity surrounding the WWF report stimulated tremendous interest and controversy around the world.

6. The debate over subsidies was particularly intense in Brussels. Gareth Porter and Scott Burns (editor of the WWF report) briefed senior EU officials there last month and also met with Brian O'Riordan and Coalition for Fair Fisheries Agreements (CFFA). The European Commission was quick to defend its record of spending more than one-third of the W's annual fisheries budget securing access for European fleets to the waters of developing countries. Ironically, in the month following the release of our report, the EU announced the renewal of fisheries agreements with three west African countries (Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire and Cape Verde). In each case, the agreements provided for an increase in the number of EU vessels allowed to fish in

the waters of these developing nations. We're planning a follow-up report for early next year.

7. In addition to our work on subsidies and other issues in the public sector, WWF is increasingly working -on complementary initiatives in the private sector. We launched the MSC in 1996 as a private sector partnership to promote the conservation and sustainable use of fisheries.

The MSC represents an innovative new approach designed to create powerful economic incentives for sustainable fishing by harnessing market forces and the power of consumer choice. Through independent, third-party certification of fisheries and labelling of seafood products, the MSC will give consumers the ability to choose products from sustainable sources. For the first time, both corporate and individual seafood buyers will be able to identify and select products from well-managed, sustainable fisheries.

8. The MSC was established as an independent organization in February 1997. Its stated mission is "to work for sustainable marine fisheries by promoting responsible, environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable fisheries practices, while maintaining the biodiversity, productivity and ecological processes of the marine environment." From the outset, we recognized the importance of the 'socially responsible' element of that mission statement.

Accordingly, we invited social scientists and experts on Southern fisheries, such as Daniel Pauly, Bob Johannes, Madeleine Hall-Arber and Matt Gianni, to a workshop in September 1996 to draft the principles and criteria for sustainable fishing that will eventually underpin the MSC. The resulting draft contains five principles, one of which deals explicitly with social issues in fisheries. We need your help to improve

The MSC represents an innovative new approach designed to create powerful economic incentives for sustainable fishing by harnessing market forces and the power of consumer choice.

In fact, certification under the auspices of the MSC could actually result in a market advantage for Southern fisheries over their Northern counterparts. After all, most of the spectacular collapses of fisheries have occurred in the North, not the South!

on the original draft.

9. To enhance the transparency of the MSC, we have held a series of formal and informal consultations around the world since last year. These workshops and meetings have given us invaluable feedback on a number of issues, especially the draft principles and criteria. The workshops allow us to interact with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.

While newsletters (of which the MSC has published three) and websites are a valuable means to disseminate information, we've found there is no substitute for face-to-face meetings and workshops where perspectives and ideas can be freely exchanged.

10. One of our foremost concerns has been the potential impact of the MSC on small-scale fishers and fisheries in developing countries. According to the FAO, products from fisheries in the developing world are increasingly being exported to Northern markets. That being the case, market mechanisms like the MSC have the potential to help promote more sustainable fishing practices in both the North and South alike.

In fact, certification under the auspices of the MSC could actually result in a market advantage for Southern fisheries over their Northern counterparts. After all, most of the spectacular collapses of fisheries have occurred in the North, not the South! For example, certification could provide a competitive edge for coastal fisheries over rival distant-water fleets operating offshore. This aspect of the MSC needs to be more fully explored in discussions with ICSF members.

11. The MSC workshops have emphasized the need to make certification available to all fisheries around the world on an equal basis. Global equivalency—or a 'level playing field'—will not only be extremely important for the success of the MSC, but is also a legal

requirement under the rules of the World Trade Organization.

The World Bank and a number of bilateral aid agencies have already demonstrated their willingness to provide support to allow small-scale operators in the developing world to become certified under the auspices of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Frankly, we believe more small-scale fisheries are likely to qualify for initial certification than large-scale enterprises. This has certainly been the experience of the FSC, which has overseen the certification of far more hectares of well managed forest in developing countries than in Northern, developed States. In the North, small-scale forest operators have banded together in co-operatives and sought certification together, sometimes assisted by their governments. We believe the same is likely to happen in small-scale, Northern fisheries.

12. In any case, we must ensure that the MSC is shaped so that it favours sustainable, small-scale fisheries, especially those in developing countries. To facilitate this, WWF and the MSC are planning a series of formal and informal consultations in the developing world during 1997-98. We have received a small grant from a Swiss-based charitable foundation for the expansion of the MSC in Latin America. However, we will need to reach out to Africa and especially Asia and the Pacific as well. We need your help to ensure that we reach the appropriate stakeholders in each region. That's why, for example, we have sought to schedule a workshop in conjunction with the ICSF meeting in February

13. Another subject on which we need your input is the proposed governance of the MSC itself. As you know, we were originally advised to choose a non-membership model, with a board of directors and a consultative forum to ensure sufficient representation and inclusiveness of all stakeholders. This has been

the subject of intense discussion at each MSC workshop, and we have received excellent advice on how the MSC should be governed. For example, most workshop participants have advised that the MSC board should not be representative or expertise-based, but should be composed of individuals of the highest possible integrity, credibility and 'statesmanship' who are committed to the cause of fisheries conservation. We need your feedback and that of your members on the proposed governance model as well.

14. Finally, I'm pleased to report that support for the MSC is growing among all stakeholder groups. To date, dozens of stakeholder organizations have registered their support, including NGOs, fish processors, retailers, fishers' groups, academic institutions and government research institutions. Influencing the behaviour of industry is obviously key to any market-led initiative like the MSC.

Without their support, we're simply trying to influence the market from outside. And if we're successful in changing the way industry does business, we could have an enormous effect on world fisheries.

Our challenge is to establish the most rigorous, defensible certification and labelling system possible, and then let it go to work. Frankly, I'm happy to have the support of progressive elements of industry in the MSC initiative. We must not allow the involvement of multinationals like Unilever in the MSC scare us away from a process that will lead to fundamental reform of an industry! That industry is involved is all the more reason that NGOs like WWF and ICSF must be part of the initiative, to help ensure that the emerging organization addresses the issues that we believe are most important. In the long run, that's the only way we can guarantee its credibility and success.

I believe ICSF has done itself and the MSC a great disservice by refusing to actively engage in the development of the organization. So far, you've rebuffed our

efforts to schedule a workshop in conjunction with an ICSF event such as your triennial meeting. The articles in SAMUDRA have been full of rhetoric and misconceptions that reflect a lack of information and understanding about the MSC. Magazine articles represent one-way communication and don't amount to constructive engagement. In the spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation, may I suggest an alternative course of action?

First, by all means continue the debate in SAMUDRA. But don't believe that this alone amounts to effective consultation! You are most welcome to print any or all of this message in the magazine, as you wish. Second, work with us to schedule a workshop on the MSC in conjunction with the ICSF triennial meeting in February or another appropriate gathering.

We're committed to reaching out to small-scale fishers and fishworkers around the world. But we don't have an unlimited budget and can't visit every country. A workshop in conjunction with an ICSF meeting would allow us to reach many more stakeholders than we could otherwise. Finally, consider serving on the board or consultative forum of the MSC when they are established some time later this year or early next year. That way, you'll have a voice in the governance and development of the MSC. And the MSC will have the benefit of your input and perspective on fisheries around the world.

I hope that this note has helped clear the way for a more positive and active role for ICSF in the development of the MSC. If the MSC evolves in a manner that does not take the perspective of small-scale fishers and those in developing countries into account, you and I will have only ourselves to hold accountable. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can provide any further information. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

We must not allow the involvement of multinationals like Unilever in the MSC scare us away from a process that will lead to fundamental reform of an industry!

When sandals meet suits

Sebastian Mathew

**As it exists, the Marine Stewardship Council initiative |
is not sufficiently inclusive of Southern stakeholders**

.....we appreciate that the target to build powerful social and economic incentives for sustainable fishing but would that not be contingent upon having fisheries mainly catering to the export market, especially of those countries that are interested in sourcing the MSC-certified fish?

I would like to express, on behalf of ICSF, our wholehearted appreciation of the painstaking efforts you have obviously made in drafting your economic incentives memorandum. It is the first time that we for sustainable fishing but would from you to some of the issues raised in that not be SAMUDRA Report on the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). It is an contingent upon important gesture towards greater having fisheries transparency, and we will do our best to mainly catering to respond to the arguments you have used the export market, to try and convince ICSF to participate especially of those in the MSC process.

At the outset, it is a pity that we do not have a copy of the draft Principles, and Criteria of the MSC. We would appreciate if you could send us a copy. We would also like to receive copies of reports of all the seven MSC workshops that you mention in your letter so that we could have a better picture of the debates at these meetings. We would also be grateful if you could send us a list of participants at these workshops. We would further like to receive copies of the studies on subsidies, especially Gareth Porter's study on the impacts of EU fisheries agreements.

It is interesting to hear that fishworkers in several parts of the world consider the MSC to be advancing their interests. We are keen to know more about these fishers' groups. Are they from the industrial sector or from the small-scale sector? Among the groups of fishworkers we know in the North,

small-scale fishers in Brittany, France and the Maritimes, Canada, harbour reservations about the Marine Stewardship Council.

The latter, in particular, have strong misgivings. International unions representing fishermen, like the International Transport Workers' Federation, also have strong reservations, if we take into consideration their interventions at the 1997 FAO's Committee on Fisheries meeting in Rome.

Now, to respond to your letter more specifically, we have the following comments to offer. On Point 1, we appreciate the target to build powerful social and economic incentives for sustainable fishing but would that not be contingent upon having fisheries mainly catering to the export market, especially of those countries that are interested in sourcing the MSC-certified fish?

Even if about 50 per cent of the quantity of global exports of fish and fish products comes from the developing countries, one-third of it comprises fishmeal which is entirely based on industrial production. Most of the fish produced in the artisanal and small-scale sector in many developing countries is sold in the domestic market and the MSC could be of little relevance in such markets. For instance, in the case of China and India—the most populous countries in Asia—less than 10 per cent of their aggregate marine fish production enters the world market.

Further, proper management of small-scale Southern marine fisheries requires an active State, and significant financial

Sebastian Mathew is executive Secretary, ICSF. This letter, dated 7 August 1997, was addressed to Michael Sutton, Director, Endangered Seas campaign, WWF International

and human resources, rather than just a market label.

The management costs of small-scale fisheries, which either need to be borne by governments or the producers, save in exceptional circumstances, will be significantly higher than those of industrial fisheries (this is true of both the North and the South) for the reasons that (a) numerous people are involved in the artisanal and small-scale fisheries; (b) the fish landing centres are far too many; and (c) the diversity of species and fishing operations is far too great.

Point 2 is valid. But how could the MSC initiative prevent foreign fishing vessels from operating in the waters of developing countries if the distant-water fleets are fishing in a responsible manner? They could be using selective fishing gear and techniques, employing legally recruited workers and be complying with international minimum standards.

Because of their responsible fishing practices, they could very well be rewarded by a labelling scheme, such as the MSC, even if their fishing activities have a negative impact on the livelihood rights of the artisanal fishers of the South: Senegal is an example.

In other words, the ecolabelling programme may be in a position to be instrumental in ensuring compliance with conservation and social principles by the distant-water fleets, but it may not be in a position to remove the social inequity perpetrated by the same fleets on the artisanal fishing communities.

Perhaps the same argument would hold true for industrial and artisanal fisheries as well. As Michael Belliveau, citing the example of the herring fishery of Canada, has pointed out in his article in SAMUDRA Report No.15, just because they have been fishing within the parameters of responsible fishing, large purse-seiners catching herring in the Atlantic would qualify for the MSC ecolabel, even

though they have displaced inshore fishers from their traditional fishing grounds.

In Point 3, are you implying that industrial fleets subsidized by the Northern countries will be penalized by the MSC? If this is practicable, it is certainly welcome.

It is good to hear about the WWF report on 'Subsidies and the Depletion of World Fisheries' and that the study generated a lot of interest and controversy around the world. In this context, we would like to point out that while we are opposed to all forms of subsidies to the industrial sector worldwide, certain kinds of subsidies to the artisanal and small-scale fishworkers maybe essential for ensuring the livelihood of fishers in many developing countries.

As for Point 8, we are happy to note that the MSC had recognized the importance of "socially responsible" fisheries from the outset.

But it is unfortunate that despite this recognition, stakeholders from the South have not, till date, been involved in the drafting of criteria and principles to underpin the MSC.

The concept of socially responsible fisheries—as the MSC Newsletter No. 2 mentions on the first page—seems to refer to fisheries that respect local law and that are undertaken by legally employed crew who enjoy international minimum standards. If this is the definition, perhaps it is applicable to industrial fisheries rather than to small-scale or artisanal fisheries. In the latter case, there is often no legal contract of employment and the recruitment of fishers is from the informal labour market, and often based on kinship. Moreover, the ILO conventions and recommendations do not apply to the artisanal and small-scale sector (a situation long overdue for change!).

ICSF believes that market-based mechanisms, such as eco-labelling, could be useful, but we would like to have a better understanding of how these mechanisms can work for the interests of small-scale fishers, especially in the developing world.

Although “influencing the behaviour of the industry is obviously key to any market-led initiative,” would certification not be much more difficult in most marine fisheries than in forestry? Moreover, the MSC certification programme is mainly targeting fish meant for export to the us and European markets.

If, by promoting socially responsible fisheries, the MSC would help advance the interests of small-scale fishers, it is most welcome. But isn't it too early to say if that is going to happen? ICSF believes that market-based mechanisms, such as eco-labelling, could be useful, but we would like to have a better understanding of how these mechanisms can work for the interests of small-scale fishers, especially in the developing world. We would like to see how local specificities are taken into consideration while developing an ecolabel. We would also like to see more examples of smallscale and local fishers benefiting from market-based mechanisms, before endorsing an ecolabelling initiative such as the MSC.

On Point 10, you are right that products from fisheries in the South are increasingly being exported to Northern markets. We do not, however, quite agree with your observation that “certification under the auspices of the MSC could actually result in a market advantage for Southern fisheries over their Northern counterparts.”

The higher prices that consumers pay for the MSC ecolabel may not translate into higher incomes for the fishers, as John Kurien observes in his article in SAMUDRA Report No. 15. As he further observes, small-scale fishers in developing countries are likely to lose their autonomy with respect to the patterns of harvesting and disposal of their catch in the foreign market, as decisions pertaining to terms of harvesting and levels of prices will be dictated by purchasers abroad. In some developing countries, this may be seen as new forms of colonialism and may even have unpleasant consequences.

We also have problems with the reference to collapsed fisheries. Once a fishery has collapsed, there is little fish around to be either caught or sold. The Newfoundland cod fishery is a good

example of how the MSC could have failed because, on the basis of scientific assessments at that time, the cod might have obtained the label until shortly before its collapse, when it would have, in any case, been too late for the fishery to benefit from the MSC label! This point is made by Michael Belliveau in SAMUDRA Report No. 15. As he further mentions in his piece, if ecolabelling is to be based on the current state of scientific knowledge, it is no guarantee for a sustainable fishery.

The first sentence of Point 11 is an interesting objective, but we feel that the stated “equal basis” is very ambitious. “Global equivalency” could very well remain a theoretical possibility. Also, the costs of ecolabels could be prohibitively high in the South, if you take into consideration the points that we have mentioned above, namely, diversity of species and fishing operations, dispersed landing centres, and the involvement of numerous fishworkers. Moreover, our understanding of WTO rules is that they are not very clear on private ecolabelling initiatives. It may take some time before some clarity emerges on this issue. We would, however, like to know your understanding of WTO rules in relation to this.

The reference to the Forest Stewardship Council would be welcome if you can take it as a basis to analyze the difficulties associated with applying the same concept to marine fisheries. In comparison with forests, the costs of defining and enforcing property rights in capture fisheries, if that ever becomes a criterion in the MSC certifying programme, will be very high and this could significantly influence the outcome of the labelling scheme.

With regard to Point 13, we feel that there is danger if there is no expertise on the MSC board to monitor the economic and social impacts of the labelling programme and to oversee the sci-

entific aspects of certification. Would it not be difficult to remain credible without expertise? If the idea is to hire such expertise, how could the MSC guarantee that independent expertise is available to monitor and evaluate the process? Perhaps both ethical and professional considerations should be reflected in the composition of the board.

Would it be possible for us to know the stakeholder organizations who have registered their support with the MSC initiative? Although “influencing the behaviour of the industry is obviously key to any market-led initiative,” would certification not be much more difficult in most marine fisheries than in forestry? Moreover, the MSC certification programme is mainly targeting fish meant for export to the US and European markets. Would it be possible to have islands of well-managed fisheries catering to the export market in the midst of overfished or optimally fished stocks catering to the domestic market? We have indeed, as you have pointed out at the beginning of your letter, got reservations about Unilever’s involvement in the whole process. As we have said before, we would have appreciated the MSC initiative much more if WWF had avoided the involvement of Unilever in the formulating stages of the initiative. In fact, one of the credibility gaps of the initiative, as far as we are concerned, is in this collaboration of “the sandals and the suits,” as described by a columnist in The Times.

We still have reservations about the credibility of a multinational like Unilever which is perhaps interested more in controlling access to fish markets than in sustainable fishing practices. As Alain Le Sann points out in his article in SAMUDRA Report No. 15, fishers could be disenfranchised by the MSC initiative, since multinationals like Unilever are likely to have a decisive impact not only on prices, but also on conditions that determine access to the markets. John Kurien also makes a similar point in his

article. Moreover, since an elegant and universal definition of ‘sustainability’ is almost impossible, the certification programme could impose its criteria for sustainability, which could be in contradiction with the understanding of fishers.

We are not yet convinced that the MSC is going to offer a fundamental reform of the fishing industry and we still have apprehensions about the initiative as such. We are also more or less sure that in the ultimate power game there are no ‘level playing fields’ and that Southern fishworkers are more likely to lose than to benefit from joining the MSC initiative as it is currently being developed. But we would like to be proved wrong in holding this view.

We are sorry to hear that you consider the articles in SAMUDRA Report “full of rhetoric and misconceptions!” You might have already noticed that I have used relevant arguments mainly from those articles. We do not think that we are doing us or MSC a disservice by showing reluctance to actively engage in the development of the organization. On the contrary, I think we have spent a considerable amount of our time to reflect on the initiative and to see how it would actually translate into practice, especially in relation to Southern fishworkers.

Given all the problems with MSC as it is envisaged now, perhaps there is no point in organizing a briefing consultation at a meeting where only ICSF members are going to be present. ICSF members are, in any case, not representing the stakeholders in fisheries; they are members of ICSF in their individual capacities.

Unless a workshop on MSC is organized at a more inclusive level with Southern stakeholders, it may not serve its intended purpose. This could be a three day workshop organized by MSC

We do not think that we are doing us or MSC a disservice by showing reluctance to actively engage in the development of the organization. On the contrary, I think we have spent a considerable amount of our time to reflect on the initiative and to see how it would actually translate into practice, especially in relation to Southern fishworkers.

involving all important stakeholders. You could, as you suggest, have such a meeting in Asia, Africa and Latin America to reform the principles and criteria also from a Southern grass-roots perspective. This would also enable the MSC to get the perspective on sustainability from fishers and their communities.

Alternatively, a meeting with analytical inputs and fair reporting procedures will be welcome with participants from the above continents. This would also meaningfully complement the consultation process that you had with the Northern scientists and other interested parties. In such a meeting, it may also be worthwhile to consider how labelling standards could be applied to brackishwater aquaculture and mariculture.

I would like to add that ICSF would like to continue this dialogue with you in good faith and in a spirit of co-operation. Our exchanges, I think, can contribute to a better understanding of ecolabelling issues in marine fisheries in relation to artisanal and small-scale fisheries in the North and the South.

Fish Stakes

The pros and cons of the Marine Stewardship Council initiative: a debate from the pages of SAMUDRA Report

The recent effort by two global organizations, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Anglo-Dutch multinational, Unilever, to establish an independent Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) as a conservation partnership to create market incentives for sustainable fishing has attracted a great deal of attention-as well as controversy. In this dossier, the pros and cons of the SC initiative are argued out in a series of articles that first appeared in AMUDRA Report, the triannual publication of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO's Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations. It also has Liaison Status with FAO. Registered in Geneva, ICSF has offices in Chennai, India and Brussels, Belgium. As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICSF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.