

Tuna management – A Private Sector Perspective
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Frabelle Fishing Corporation is a fully integrated seafood company based in the Philippines and operating in areas that are part of the coral triangle. We have established a tuna processing and fishing entity in Papua New Guinea and we are also part of a Filipino group who have acquired the PT Sinar Tuna processing plant in Indonesia. We have plans of setting up a fully integrated operation in the Solomon Islands as well in the near future.

Our fishing venture outside of the Philippine waters was initially a simple business decision primarily based on the need to be able to fish or operate the whole year round.

Our experience in the Philippines indicated that supply was becoming erratic and unreliable especially in relation to sardine and tuna fishing as more fishing groups were established. In addition we worried that many players within our local industry had started to use illegally sized nets where even juvenile tuna and the round scad (their source of food) were being caught without being monitored or controlled.

Our venture in the Pacific was bolstered when the Pacific Coastal states under the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) of the South Pacific Commission (SPC) established capacity limits. At that time they decided that purse seine fishing access in their waters was to be limited to 205 vessels. There was also a program to gradually decrease foreign access vessels so that the Pacific Coastal States will have chance to develop their own tuna fishery.

In the Philippines, where fishing is almost a right for every Filipino encouraging open access, we worried about continuity of our fishing business and as time passed we were proven correct as the local tuna fishing industry in the Philippines subsequently collapsed. In the Pacific where fishing is treated as a privilege we had peace of mind knowing that fish supply is ensured as capacity control management measures are being implemented.

And, because we value this privilege granted to us, we geared ourselves for involvement in the Pacific Coastal States fishery development and, as such, have committed ourselves to invest in land based facilities in the region.

We have witnessed and in fact have participated in the establishment of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). As stakeholders and investors in the tuna industry, we were quite excited that a commission for the Western and Central Pacific who shall regulate fish stocks within its migratory range was established.

The WCPFC have made great strides in order to regulate fish stocks under its convention area. But having to balance the interest of various stakeholders, the commission struggles and will continue to do so to protect the fishery. As such it would fall back on the coastal states to take more responsibility of its waters and work among all coastal states and flag states to satisfy their respective economic gains and insure sustainability of the resources.

The commission becomes the venue to insure compatibility of management measures that shall regulate the whole range of identified fish stocks.

We, the private sector, are amused at how scientists and fish managers argue their case, but in the end, they consult the industry; For us, this is an indication that no matter how scientists and regulators may reason out, reason out it is actually the private sector or the fishermen who contribute the most in the success or failure of the Commission in the management of the fish stocks.

It is ironic that the Pacific Coastal states have changed the conservation measure from Capacity control through the 205 vessel cap on purse seine vessel to effort control based on the recently established vessel fishing days or the VDS scheme. And as the scheme came into place, the Commission scientists indicated the need to reduce fishing mortality for big eye tuna to keep it sustainable. We think it would have been more achievable to implement any reduction scheme if the original 205 vessel cap was retained and the domestication of the foreign access fleet within this cap was pushed.

While the WCPFC was being formed we have also witnessed the increasing number of new vessels and fishing entities participating in the tuna fishery; it was as if this served as a cue to get into the tuna fishing before it becomes a close fishery.

Now we are in a situation where:

- 1.) We have more fishing vessels in or still trying to get in the convention area, and some of these vessels are coming from other less productive regions;
- 2.) There is a need to address the aspiration of the Pacific Coastal States to develop their fishery; while all coastal states want this, the reality is that their fishermen are not willing to work to achieve their goal.
- 3.) There is a need to reduce fishing mortality of a specific fish stock in a mixed specie fishery.

The recently held Kobe 11 Management Meeting addressing allocation and management of fishing capacity was very revealing. Private sector indicated their willingness to work with the Pacific Coastal States to respond to their aspiration and all parties acknowledged need to control capacity.

While the closing of certain high seas have made management easier as open access waters became inaccessible, the purpose for the closure did not match the scientific intent. The high seas that were closed had an acceptable rate of BIG eye by catch, while high seas which have higher percentage of big eye catch continue to be open.

Papua New Guinea's system for monitoring and enforcement (PNG) is becoming a very good standard and we hope this can be applied over the region. They apply 100% fish observer coverage. Their VMS is now being enhanced so that operational data contained in the catch log sheets can be logged directly from the vessel to the authority in real time. We are negotiating with PNG to allow us similar access to data from our vessels because this will insure better management and control of our fishing operations as well.

Our cannery in PNG has been subject to rigid inspection to become EU compliant and is now a recognized facility with a EU number. Food safety standards require strict documentation and monitoring of fish at all levels, from the time it is caught until its delivery to retailers. Operational forms such as catch log sheets up to trade documentation as required by EU IUU program have made it possible to have full traceability of any fish delivered to consumers.

Having to account for every fish caught for has significantly contributed to conservation and proper utilization of the resources.

While all parties concerned still struggle to conform with the EU IUU documentation scheme, understanding the intent of the scheme gives one a better appreciation of its need, thus resulting to easier compliance. If the same arrangement with similar reporting schemes is applied in all market states including domestic markets, we think this will lead to better resource management, and then there will be no real need for Eco labeling from a third party.

As an investor in the fishery, we are happy to comply and look forward to having all of these measures in place.

Eco labeling is not a new challenge to us. We have complied with Earth Islands Institute's Dolphin safe standards; we have voluntarily requested accreditation by the Friends of the Sea. Within the PNA area, there is now an on going audit to get the Purse Seine fishing on free schools certified by MSC.

Covering such a large fishery, there are many areas that needs clarification. Chain of custody documentation follows a traceability program that identifies and separates fish that qualifies from those that does not qualify.

The advanced state of communication has allowed for an expanding degree of awareness among consumers. And this has also encouraged more parties to promote sustainability and introduce their own eco label for a fee. There are concerns that in the long run all consumer products would be eco labeled and thus no longer enjoy the added value of being branded as such, if getting certified means being subject to more stringent controls to insure sustainability, then so be it, but at what cost? And who should profit from this?

At the end of the day, all parties concerned have to sit down and agree to make simple measures that everyone can follow. WCPFC is such an organization that can be effective with the right mandate from its member countries, and stakeholders.

Here are some of our suggestions;

1. Moratorium on increase of vessel number in the CTI, as scientists sort out the real situation of the fishery
2. Scrapping of Vessel Days Scheme
3. Vessel number limit to be imposed again as it is the best system and the most simple and effective measure for conservation
4. Vessel capacity limit should be imposed.. Each vessel has to have a maximum size.
5. Strictly regulation of mesh sizes used in the fishery
6. Strictly regulation of fishing gears also
7. Closure of spawning grounds and areas with high mortality of endangered stocks from any commercial fishing activity.
8. For WCPFC to come out with its Eco label as the only one that is certified by all. And hiring of a 3rd party auditing firm to audit all data and results of WCPFC monitoring and surveillance.
9. Distant water entities must work with the Coastal states to develop their fishery by sharing their fishing capacity and more important to process a big percentage of the catch on-shore so that coastal states gain the added value in processing the fish and encourage participation of the coastal states in the fishery.

Fishing within the CT involves a lot more responsibility being identified to host a large spawning area for the tuna fish. It would then make a lot of sense to form a CT group in any organization where countries within CT are members. This is not only to promote our interest but to insure other stakeholders outside of the CT become aware of our concerns as well. We need to manage our coastal fishery and must understand the interchange of our stocks with other stocks in the Pacific and other nearby oceans.

A tuna tagging program would help establish the degree of exchange of the CT tuna stocks in the Pacific and in addition, we must also support a genetic variation study of these stocks.

CT areas involves a lot of fad fishing, the industry must exert more effort to develop means to avoid juvenile stocks being caught.