

MPA NEWS



Published on MPA News (<https://mpanews.openchannels.org>)

In Galápagos, Clashes Between Fishers and Managers Jeopardize Conservation Efforts

Dozens of fishers in the Galápagos Islands, angered by resource managers' refusal to expand a lobster quota, rioted in mid-November, looting and destroying buildings including the administrative building of the Galápagos National Park. Eventually halted by military personnel sent from mainland Ecuador, the clashes signaled the continuation of episodes among Galapagueño fishers to use violence to oppose conservation efforts.

Conservation scientists in the Galápagos Islands face the challenge of implementing several initiatives -- including a zoning plan to create a network of no-take areas (MPA 1:7) -- in an island society that is increasingly trying to benefit from valuable fisheries.

Gold-rush fisheries

Although industrial fishing is banned within the 140,000 sq. km Galápagos Marine Reserve, "artisanal fishing" by locals is still allowed in most of it. The reserve was created in 1998 by the Special Law of the Galápagos, which placed the reserve under the jurisdiction of the National Parks Service. The National Parks Service also oversees the Galápagos National Park.

The mid-November unrest is the latest in a string of serious conflicts dating back to 1992, coinciding with the development of sea cucumber fishing in the archipelago. Efforts by park officials to place restrictions on the sea cucumber harvest in the mid-1990s led to the shooting of one park official and threats to other officials working for the park and for the Charles Darwin Research Station.

Owing to the islands' sea cucumber fishery and a growing, yet illegal, shark-fin fishery, the gross income of the Galápagos fishing sector has skyrocketed in the past few years. The sea cucumber fishery is worth US \$3.5-4.0 million to Galápagos fishermen per annual two-month season, and shark fins are reportedly earning \$100 per shark. With the money to be made, these are boom times for Galapagueño fishers. The number of registered *pepinos* (sea cucumber fishers) in Galápagos rose more than 70% from 1999 to 2000 alone. Many locals with limited experience in the fishing sector have declared themselves to be fishers, and some fishing cooperatives have accepted them.

What partly sparked the riots in November was a price spike in the value of spiny lobster, which attracted the burgeoning fishing effort to target on that fishery. By some reports, it was possible in the 2000 lobster fishery to earn US \$500/day, compared to perhaps US \$100/day in 1999. Some officials have questioned the US \$500/day figure as an exaggeration; nonetheless, the number of registered divers for lobster in Galápagos jumped from 200 in 1999 to 450 in 2000.

Amid this surge in fishing effort, the national government's quota of 50 metric tons of lobster tails for the four-month season (September to December) was reached by the end of October. Fishers appealed to the local Participatory Management Board -- composed of local authorities and representatives from the tourism, fishing, and conservation sectors -- but the board reconfirmed the closure in early November.

Following this, from 13-17 November, groups of fishers mobilized and engaged in a number of disruptive activities, including seizing local government and research institutions, kidnapping giant tortoises from a tortoise raising center, and even ramming tourists' dinghies with fishing boats. The private home of Park Director Juan Chavez was invaded and destroyed; gifts of toys and clothes intended for his children were stolen and distributed in the streets.

Reactions

The recent rioting saddened conservation officials and scientists, who have teamed with local stakeholders in the past half-decade to conduct research and define a marine zoning scheme.

Rodrigo Bustamante, former head of marine research and conservation for the Charles Darwin Research Station during the marine zoning process, placed blame for the violence on a number of factors. He expressed his personal thoughts on the violence -- including reasons for, and possible responses to -- in an essay, which MPA has excerpted (see boxes at end of article).

Jerry Wellington, a University of Houston (US) coral biologist who has assisted in Galápagos marine planning since the 1970s, said he has observed episodes of violence against Galápagos park wardens dating back decades. He had hoped, however, that a corner had been turned with the recent participatory management efforts. "I had great expectations six months ago," he said. "Then it all of a sudden blew up."

Two years ago, a Galápagos Islands census counted 16,000 people. Although this is widely considered an underestimate in light of recent fishing-related immigration, the size of the community is nonetheless relatively small, and this has led to enforcement difficulties, said Wellington. "The rule of law is weak in the islands, because the law enforcement authorities are so closely tied to the population," he said. "It's a closed community. It's hard to punish your uncle or your grandfather." He said this was why the riots in mid-November lasted for several days, eventually necessitating military intervention.

Roberto Troya, director of the Ecuador program for The Nature Conservancy, said there is also low credibility for the Ecuadorian government's commitment to enforcement of the Special Law for the Galápagos. With low credibility, there is little public fear of government-led crackdowns, he said.

Troya added that for violence to be averted in the future, locals must be incorporated more effectively in the tourism industry so that they may generate alternative sources of income. It should be noted that the zoning plan includes provisions to develop such economic alternatives, including preferential access for former fishers to new permits for marine tourism activities.

For more information:

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Box: Factors That Led to the Violence

What factors led to November's conflicts in the Galápagos Islands? Rodrigo Bustamante, former head of marine research and conservation at the islands' Charles Darwin Research Station, says the answers are complex. In an essay describing his personal thoughts on the recent situation, Bustamante describes in one passage the primary factors that played formative roles in the clashes. Below, MPA News has reprinted, with permission, that passage from his essay:

"First, the participatory management process requires that decisions agreed during the process must be respected. Law enforcement is then needed, and in the case of Galápagos, has been inadequate. This inadequacy has reinforced the impression among fishers (and some Galápagos politicians) that mobilizing masses for pressure and violence is an acceptable way of achieving outcomes.

"Second, the closure of the lobster season provided a 'good' excuse for some sectors of the fishing community to pressure local authorities about other recent fishing restrictions that attempt to reduce increasing and unregulated impact of fishing on marine species. These restrictions are the banning of the use of long-lines and prohibition of all shark fishing (all species banned or restricted until ongoing negotiations and technical reports are completed).

"Third, not all fishers and fishing communities in Galápagos are the same, nor behave the same. The majority of the most aggressive and belligerent ones are newcomers (1-5 years in Galápagos),

attracted by the 'gold rush' of fisheries for sea cucumbers and shark fin, with no long-term goals or commitments toward conservation and sustainable development. Some are larger and older, others are relatively small and new; but in both cases, unscrupulous seafood dealers and shrewd but shortsighted politicians and community leaders influence and lobby against management and conservation provisions as their political platforms, depicting the authorities as 'oppressors' of the poor fishing communities (with the hope that this will secure them votes for next election!).

"Fourth, despite the advances for conservation in Galápagos, some unresolved issues still remain that are critical for the long-term success of marine conservation. The most important is the lack of detailed regulations of artisanal fishing within the Galápagos Marine Reserve (GMR), overdue since 1998. Because of its slow nature, the participative process has so far failed to define the limits for fisheries growth of numbers of boats and people, nor has it detailed technical specifications and/or dimensions of boats and fishing arts. These are still under ongoing assessments and further negotiations."

[Note: *Bustamante's full essay is on the web*]

Box: Preventing Future Clashes: What Needs to Be Done?

In his essay, Bustamante describes several measures as necessary in order to prevent fisher/manager conflicts from continuing to occur in the Galápagos. These measures are reprinted below, with permission, by MPA News:

- Strengthen and consolidate the participatory management, including renewed efforts to support the weak basis of the stakeholders and to make a real connection between bottom-up and top-down decision-making for management and conservation.
- Help and facilitate the Ecuadorian authorities to publish and implement the special regulations for fishing and its development within the marine reserve.
- Promote and expand the incipient research and understanding of the economic and social drivers that are affecting conservation, with the objective to incorporate the relevant factors into an integrative model for human development guided by the protection and conservation goals for the Galápagos Islands.
- Expand the marine education and awareness programs to all four inhabited islands, with special attention to local leaders and politicians in order to find a common vision for long-term conservation.
- Initiate a broad-base communication campaign aimed to all fishers to realize that increasing numbers of fishers on cooperative books is not in their interest at all but is only in the interest of the leaders because of the expanded power base.
- Strengthen the fisheries and fishing-independent management of single-species fisheries based on sound demographic approaches incorporating economic and social parameters, and at the same time initiate multispecies approaches to understand the consequences of fishing on other components of the marine ecosystem.
- Increase the protection and monitoring of the no-take area network as the most important management tool for conservation of Galápagos marine biodiversity.

[Note: *Bustamante's full essay is on the web*]

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