



Sri Lanka Workshop Makes Recommendations on Safety at Sea



Several ideas and recommendations emerged from a National Workshop on Safety at Sea for Small-scale Fisheries, held in Negombo, Sri Lanka on 11-12 October 2007. It was organised jointly by the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and the BOBP-IGO, and drew an audience of 44 – from government agencies, fisheries co-operative societies and boatyards. Mr G Piyasena,

Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (MFAR), Government of Sri Lanka chaired the workshop.

After an inaugural session and a technical session, three groups of workshop participants huddled in conclave to discuss three subject areas: (i) Knowledge gaps on safety awareness in fisher communities; (ii) Knowledge gaps on safety at sea initiatives in national agencies; and

(iii) Knowledge gaps on safety aspects in fisheries. They adopted three “action points” for implementing a Safety at Sea Project in Sri Lanka:

- All pilot-scale activities will be carried out at Beruwala, a major fishing centre south of Colombo.
- A committee comprising nominees from national fishery agencies, district fishery bodies, fisheries co-operative societies, local leaders of influence, and women from the fisher community, will be formed to oversee the pilot activities.
- A baseline survey will be conducted to assess present knowledge and awareness of safety at sea aspects. The MFAR and the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR) will conduct the survey on the basis of a questionnaire prepared by BOBP-IGO for each category of stakeholders. This will serve as a benchmark for monitoring the effectiveness of the awareness campaign.

Mr G Piyasena, Secretary, MFAR speaking at the inaugural session



Inaugural Session

At the inaugural session held earlier, FAO Representative Pote Chumsiri welcomed workshop participants. He said the FAO's close links with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources had been strengthened after the 26 December 2004 tsunami. Both agencies had worked together as a team to restore the livelihoods of fishers and strengthen the industry to 'build back better'.

Mr Piyasena said safety at sea is often neglected in developing countries, particularly in small-scale fisheries, because of inadequate awareness of safety issues, lack of safety guidelines for fishing crafts and methods, poor distress response strategies and infrastructure, and inadequate rules and regulations to address the needs of small-scale fishermen. The FAO's global safety at sea project would address these issues.

Mr R Ravikumar, FAO Regional Coordinator for the South Asia component of the Project on Safety at Sea for Small-scale Fisheries in Developing Countries, said this component would be implemented in cooperation with the BOBP-IGO. Besides, an IMO-FAO Project would focus on Guidelines for the Design, Construction and Equipment of Small Fishing Vessels. Both projects would be funded by the Swedish International Development Agency - Sida.

Mr Ravikumar said the Project would focus on (i) awareness-building to promote a safety at sea culture within the fishing community and other stakeholders; (ii) education and training of trainers, extension workers and fisherfolk to understand sea safety requirements; (iii) introduction of FAO/ IMO/ ILO draft guidelines for design and construction and equipment of small FRP fishing boats; (iv) supporting the elaboration of proposals for implementing safety regulations as part of fishery management measures; (v) review of accidents-



at-sea reporting systems and design of an appropriate reporting and analysis procedure for implementation by appropriate authorities; (vi) promoting gender and HIV/AIDS awareness-raising campaigns in connection with safety-at-sea awareness campaigns; and (vii) promoting adequate representation of women and youth in safety-at-sea work ethics.

Mr Neomal Perera, Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, said (in a paper read out by Mr L S Fernando, Chairman, National Institute of Fisheries and Nautical Engineering), that statistics proved that fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. But existing regulations covered only large vessels and exempted vessels under 24 meters. In most countries, safety education and training are carried out on a voluntary basis, and are not obligatory. It is now argued, he said, that safety at sea should be integrated into the general management of fisheries. He hoped that the new FAO project would move forward initiatives already taken to improve sea safety for small-scale fishermen in Sri Lanka.

In his inaugural address, Mr Felix Perera, Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (in a paper read out by Mr D R Jayasinghe, Chairman, Cey-Nor Foundation) thanked the FAO for its contributions to fisheries

development in Sri Lanka. He recalled that FAO played the leading role in securing over US \$23 million for tsunami rehabilitation in fisheries in Sri Lanka. All FAO tsunami-rehabilitation projects had been implemented in close collaboration with his Ministry and its agencies. He thanked the FAO, also the Government and the people of Sweden for helping improve the sea safety of small-scale fishers in developing countries.

Dr Y S Yadava, Director, BOBP-IGO proposed a vote of thanks.

Technical Session

Four presentations were made in the technical session. Mr H S G Fernando, Director-General (Development), MFAR, discussed the 'Current status of safety-at-sea initiatives in fisheries'. He said fishing boats in Sri Lanka had increased in number by 35 percent after the tsunami. The highest increase was in motorized traditional craft (175 %), followed by multiday boats (66 %) and FRP outboard boats (54 %). But the number of day boats had fallen by 23 percent.

Providing an overview of fishing-related accidents at sea, Mr Fernando said that the number of accidents had fallen from an average of 32 per year during the period 1994 - 2001, to 10-20 per year during the period 2002 -2006. He said the major causes of

accidents at sea were drifting, collision and capsizing and sinking. Inferior quality of engines and bad installation, poor operation and maintenance, lack of practical knowledge on trouble-shooting, non-availability or non-operation of navigational lights, loss of stability, crew fatigue and operation in the rough sea were some of the major reasons for the accidents in Sri Lanka.

He said effective approaches to safety at sea should rely on three lines of defense – prevention (the most reliable and cost-effective method); survival and self-rescue; and Search and Rescue (SAR), the most costly approach.

He said legislation is necessary on vessel standards and specifications, vessel design and construction, safety training, etc. Community training programmes for promoting safety at sea, community participation and insurance schemes for fisher communities were essential.

Emphasizing the need to make safety at sea an integral part of fisheries management, Mr Fernando said the Government of Sri Lanka had taken initiatives to draft the Fishing Boat (design, construction and equipment) Regulations and the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Amendment) Bill. The recently established 'Vessel Survey Unit' of DFAR should be strengthened. Safety training courses for skippers of multi-day boats and awareness programmes to inculcate a safety culture among fishing communities were two other suggestions he made.

Commander Kalana Jinadasa of the Sri Lanka Navy presented an 'Overview of Search and Rescue Operations and recommendations'. He said the 1979 SAR Convention was designed to provide a global system for responding to emergencies, while the GMDSS was established to provide it with efficient communication support. Both the GMDSS and SAR are crucial to maritime safety and are

designed to ensure that any emergency at sea will result in a distress call.

The Convention outlines operating procedures to be followed in the event of emergencies or alerts and during SAR operations. The Convention has divided the world's oceans into 13 areas for search and rescue purposes. Parties to the Convention are required to ensure that arrangements are made for adequate SAR services in their coastal waters. The Government of Sri Lanka is yet to ratify the Convention.

Commander Jinadasa said that SAR is a costly operation. Search by air is the most effective method, but it can be prohibitively costly. One of the cost-effective ways to implement SAR is to form local safety-at-sea organisations. They can be set up nationally and help to conduct awareness campaigns, safety courses, fund-raising and lobbying. They can also provide volunteers to take part in SAR when the need arises.

A presentation on 'Overview of Standards and Procedures followed in Design Construction and Equipping of Fishing Vessels in Sri Lanka' was made by Mr G J D W Dayananda, Marine Engineer, DFAR. He said that fishing vessels in Sri Lanka are built in more than a hundred boatyards scattered in the coastal areas of the country. Every boatyard ought to be registered with the DFAR after fulfilling stipulated conditions relating to infrastructure facilities, compliance with industrial safety regulations, environmental clearance, etc. It should exercise quality control procedures – such as regularizing temperature and humidity, maintaining workshop machinery and tools to suit construction.

Mr Dayananda said that DFAR is enforcing standards but in a legislative void. The void was exploited by boatbuilders after the tsunami. They set up a number of boatyards and constructed inferior boats. Since regulations had now

been drafted with FAO help, enforcement would be much easier. The DFAR needed capacity-building and further strengthening to meet the changing requirements of the boatbuilding sector.

Mr Shanta Bhandara, Director, MFAR, made a presentation on 'Strategy for building awareness within the fisher community for developing a sea safety culture'. He said that Sri Lanka has 2 637 marine fishing villages and some 200 000 fishers (including inland fishers). If trade/ service/ input suppliers and those who depend on their livelihoods for fishing are added, the total number would go up to about 2 400 000. Thirty six national and international NGOs are active in fisheries in the country.

He stressed the importance of fisheries co-operative societies – which function as a community organization: to carry out fisheries development schemes, promote thrift in the fishing community, implement credit schemes, mediate conflicts among fisherfolk, help implement management plans and serve as community mobilizers.

Mr Bhandara urged formal training for field officers (training of trainers), and for fishermen as well, on safety at sea. The training needs should focus on IMO guidelines, on the FAO manual relating to safety of fishermen, and on DFAR regulations relating to safety of fishing vessels. The awareness programmes should be conducted at fisheries harbours, anchorages and fish landing sites and also at the general meetings of fisheries societies. Extension methods would include short documentary films, posters, notices, radio programmes, cartoons and leaflets. Stickers could be put up on fishing boats.

Mr Piyasena hailed the success of the workshop and thanked the BOBP-IGO for organizing it.