

# Gulbrandsen Re-visits Fisheries Centres of South India



Oyvind Gulbrandsen was profiled by *Bay of Bengal News* 27 years ago – in the very first issue of BBN (January 1981). That article focused on Gulbrandsen's work as consultant in designing BOBP's beachcraft development programme, which was a major activity during the Programme's first decade.

That article described Gulbrandsen's early work for the FAO in designing boats in Western Samoa, and his travels all along India's east coast in March 1979 to study the small-scale fisheries scene as preparation for designing a beachcraft programme for small-scale fishers.

R Ravikumar, then BOBP's fishing craft specialist, said of Gulbrandsen: "I admire the meticulousness with which Oyvind studies the local ethos, the local environment and capability before starting a design. There is always a sound rationale for his decisions."

Fast forward to November 2007. Oyvind Gulbrandsen revisited Puri, Visakhapatnam, Kakinada, Cuddalore and Tuticorin in India. He also visited Negombo, Beruwala and Galle in Sri Lanka. His tour was to study the status of safety of fishing vessels, identify key problems, and collect baseline information for the IMO component of the ongoing FAO-SIDA safety at sea project, being executed under the BOBP-IGO umbrella.

He met scores of fishers, boatbuilders and officials with whom he had worked in the past for BOBP. Gulbrandsen will use his observations and findings to prepare technical guidelines for fishing vessels in India and Sri Lanka – an update of his very popular "Safety Guide for Fishing Boats" BOBP/MAG/16.



*A traditional Andhra boat with an outboard motor fitted with long-tail propulsion unit*



*Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu fishers back from a good fishing trip*



*Mr Gulbrandsen inspecting a FRP boat in Chinna Neelangarai, Tamil Nadu*

“It is always a joy to come here,” said Gulbrandsen. “Fisherfolk in this part of the world are the most friendly and happy people that I have encountered anywhere.” Gulbrandsen took masses of photographs of fishers and fishing boats with his compact Fuji 8 mega pixel digital camera to visually document his findings.

He spoke about what he saw and learned on his east coast tour at the National Workshop on Safety at Sea organised by BOBP-IGO in Chennai on 3-4 December, 2007.

“Imagine fishers battling strong waves and rough weather on a dark night. It’s a tough life,” Gulbrandsen observed. “We must make his life easier and safer, and of course prevent him from drowning.”

“I was here last after the 1996 cyclone hit Andhra Pradesh and more than 500 fishers were killed. Since then, there have been some positive steps. A key word is communication. Even small-scale fishers carry mobile phones. These have their limitations but are better than nothing. They are useful when fishers have to be warned about approaching cyclones.”

Gulbrandsen said he noticed that trawlers in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have some equipment such as echosounders. But there were no navigation lights, very few life floats, not a single life jacket. “Formulating sea safety regulations is important, but there is no point if they are not implemented, Gulbrandsen noted. He added that the trawlers could do with a lot of improvements to engine installation and fittings.”

Gulbrandsen was critical about the use of ‘long-tail’ propulsion units on boats operating from surf beaten beaches as they could cause fatal accidents to shore crew. “Long-tail engines have been used with thousands of boats provided by donors. In calm conditions these are good, but there is a problem during surf-crossing.” Deaths have occurred because of fishers being hit by the propellers.

Gulbrandsen’s main observation related to the large-scale introduction of FRP craft in Tamil Nadu after the December 2004 tsunami which devastated fishers, their boats and livelihoods.

Most of these craft had been financed by donors who wanted to do their bit for tsunami relief. But the construction quality of the craft was poor and the boats started leaking very soon. They had been made by inexperienced builders who knew little about FRP. “I wish donors who provided these boats assist fishers with the repairs.” He added that concrete steps were needed to assist and train boatbuilders, and improve both their awareness of regulations and compliance with them.

“In a wooden plank you notice a problem immediately, not so with an FRP craft. FRP has come to stay, so it is vital to improve the skills of boatbuilders,” Gulbrandsen said. “BOBP introduced the first FRP fishing boat to the east coast through the IND-20 beachlanding craft designed by R Ravikumar. It is still being used in Puri, and has a safe installation for surf-crossing, which could be demonstrated any time to those interested.”

Referring to Sri Lanka, Gulbrandsen said he had visited the Island after the tsunami in connection with rehabilitation work. He didn’t notice any major change there during his current trip.

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## Ideas Abound at Sea Safety Workshop in Chennai

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On the basis of the group discussions, the workshop adopted the following three action points for implementation of the Safety at Sea Project in India:

- All pilot-scale activities will be carried out in a fishing harbor/ fish landing site – such as Chennai in Tamil Nadu, Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.
- A committee comprising nominees from national fishery agencies, district fishery bodies, fishery cooperative 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. A consultant will conduct the survey on the basis of a questionnaire prepared by BOBP-IGO for each category of stakeholder. This will serve as a benchmark for monitoring the effectiveness of the awareness campaign.

During the workshop’s concluding session, Mr Per Danielsson said that the poor quality FRP boats constructed during the post-tsunami period in Tamil Nadu should be repaired. Boats beyond repair should be recalled. Insurance for fishing boats should be linked to their construction standards.

Mr Seshadri said that liquor is a major problem in the fishing community, and compounds other social problems. The open-access nature of fisheries needs to be urgently addressed. There are too many boats; they must be regulated if fisheries is to be sustained.

Mr Seshadri further said that analyses of all fishing-related mortalities are a must – we must go into the cause before looking for the solution. He referred to the three E’s of safety – engineering, education & enforcement. All three factors must be studied and addressed simultaneously to improve the safety and health of small-scale fishers.

He thanked the BOBP-IGO for organizing the workshop and all participants for smooth conduct of the workshop. Dr Y S Yadava proposed a vote of thanks.