



Improving Safety and Health of Fishing Communities: A Bay of Bengal Initiative

Workshop Announcement

An international workshop on Improving Safety and Health of Fishing Communities is being organized on 13–14 December 2010 in Mahabalipuram, India, at the Radisson Temple Bay Hotel, 60 km south of Chennai city, adjacent to a fishing village.

Joint Organizers:

- The Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO), which has safety at sea as one of its mandates and is coordinating the Initiative.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which is helping Safety at Sea efforts for the region's fishers.
- The Alaska Pacific Regional Office of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (APRO/NIOSH), which is providing assistance with public health (epidemiology) and technology development.

Taking part in the workshop are officials from the governments of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives; representatives of NGOs; experts in sea safety; and current and potential investors and donors in infrastructure development, technology and training in areas such as telecommunications, warning systems, safety equipment and insurance.

Why this workshop? Fishing is by far the world's most dangerous occupation. Fishermen account for only 1% of the worldwide workforce but 7% of the fatalities. Of the 6-8 million fishermen in the Bay of Bengal region, 5,000 to 7,000 may be lost at sea every year. The December 2004 tsunami killed nearly 200,000 fishermen. Cyclones in Bangladesh have felled some 650,000 since 1970.

Further, fishermen in the region belong to the poorest of the poor communities. Set in remote localities, fishing hamlets often receive least priority in the development programs. Result: Fishermen not only have low literacy rates but their villages also lack basic civic amenities such as safe drinking water, safe sanitation, etc.

In the west, training and education, better-built and better equipped vessels, improved weather warning systems and sophisticated search-and-rescue technologies have brought down fishermen fatalities. But hazards and death continue

to haunt the fishermen and fisheries of developing countries. A concerted effort – in knowledge, in technology, in awareness, in understanding, in funds – is imperative.

At the workshop, officials of the four countries will seek to better understand and prevent deaths among fishermen, and strengthen the safety and health of fishing communities of the Bay. The investors will explore opportunities in technology and finance in the wide-ranging multi-disciplinary safety-at-sea systems.

Matters to be discussed in detail will include:

- Reconstitution of the FAO Safety at Sea Program;
- Developments in technology and finance related to safety at sea;
- Data analysis and planning for interventions, public health planning, etc;
- New indemnity (life and disability insurance) programs;
- A regional approach to search-and-rescue mechanisms;
- Communications/warning devices:
 - Mobile devices such as VHF plus GMS/GPS – to deal with emergencies as well as marketing needs.
 - EPIRBS (Small, portable emergency position indicating radio beacons).
 - Solar-powered lighted masts.
 - Cellular telephone continuity.
 - Weather radio (for cyclone and tsunami warnings).
 - Personal flotation devices.

The organizers invite commercial investors and current and potential donors to consider participation in this important workshop that will strengthen knowledge and understanding, stimulate initiatives and generate action to improve and enhance safety at sea.

