

# BAY OF BENGAL NEWS

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One of the matters uppermost in the minds of people who have been associated with the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP) is whether it will develop as an Inter-Governmental Organization (IGO) to meet the growing needs of the coastal fisheries in the Bay of Bengal (BOB) region – or end up as a page in the annals of history.

The Documentation of Learnings of the Third Phase (BOBP/REP/85), though not intended to explore the member-countries' views on the future of BOBP, came out with a clear message that the Programme should continue to tackle the challenges of fisheries in the region. Subsequently, in Phuket, Thailand, representatives of the national governments at the 24th Advisory Committee Meeting in October 1999 voiced clearly and categorically, through the Phuket Declaration, their desire to see BOBP emerge as an IGO.

### Why an IGO?

The role of coastal fisheries in food security, employment and income in the BOB countries is critical. The BOB large marine ecosystem supports some 6-8 million fish harvesters directly, of whom about 90 percent are small-scale fishermen. Besides, about 35-40 million others are engaged in ancillary activities relating to fisheries. The region covers some of the most productive waters in the world and a fisheries which is characterized by complexities of multi-gear and multi-species resources.

However, in the new millennium, small-scale fisheries in the BOB region is confronted with tough problems and challenges. Declining catches, continuous degradation of the environment, post-harvest losses, conflicts between large-scale and small-

scale harvesters, and a host of other issues fast threaten the livelihood of millions of small-scale fishers.

Governments in the region have long recognised the need for fisheries management to improve the situation, but have lacked resources and technical expertise, even the will. The changes necessary to develop small-scale fisheries in general, and in the BOB region in particular, are influenced by the complex interaction of social, political, economic and technological forces. Further, there is often strong resistance to change – because small-scale fisher communities are deeply rooted in tradition. To effect substantive transformation through changes in attitudes, knowledge, and skills and through the adoption of more efficient and effective methods of resource utilization, substantial effort would be required at all levels.

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