



Transforming Offshore Fisheries Governance

Increasing economic value and social benefits through collective action in Myanmar

The mixing of the offshore and inshore fishing fleets in Myeik. Photo by Doug Rader (EDF)

SECTOR SNAPSHOT

- Offshore fisheries are those beyond 10 nm from the shore to the limit of the Exclusive Economic Zone. More than 1.4 million offshore and inshore fishers are registered in Myanmar.
- The offshore fishery sector is reported to have a fleet of over 2,700 vessels (DoF, 2015), which is widely considered to exceed the carrying capacity of target stocks.
- Accurate or reliable offshore fisheries production statistics do not exist owing to official adjustments made to landings statistics; official production statistics put the total annual marine harvest at 2.85 million MT 2014-15, a likely gross overestimate of the real landings volume.
- A ban on the licensing of foreign vessels imposed on 1st April, 2015, but domestic and foreign Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing still exists.

SUMMARY

Myanmar's offshore fish stocks have been depleted by up to 80% since 1979, exposing Myanmar's people to significant economic, food security, nutrition and environmental risks. This ecosystem decline has been driven by out-dated and weak laws and policies and by inadequate management and institutional capacity. Investment in protecting and restoring fish stocks, ecosystems and habitats is required. This policy brief describes how Myanmar's fisheries can be rebuilt and long-term economic, social and environmental benefits captured for the benefit of Myanmar's people through a focus on improving laws, policies, partnerships, management and institutional capacities.

KEY MESSAGES

- Stocks are depleted and require rebuilding plans and partnerships.
- Integrated, ecosystem-based and spatial approaches can improve management.
- Sustainable offshore fisheries can support economic development, jobs and food security.
- Policies and laws can be modernized to manage offshore fish stocks effectively.
- Institutional reforms can unlock the full potential of offshore fisheries.

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar's marine environment supports a number of industries, including fishing, shipping, tourism, and gas exploration and production. Myanmar's situation is not unique. Many countries confront the question of how to manage multiple uses in their maritime zones, and how to switch from unsustainable "business as usual" practices towards a well-governed and sustainable marine economy. The political, social and economic risks inherent to the continued over-exploitation of marine resources can be mitigated. Increased value capture from offshore fisheries for Myanmar's people can be achieved. This policy brief highlights the benefits of adopting integrated approaches to management to transform marine governance.

1. EMPHASIZE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Beyond food and employment, fishing economies contribute billions to global GDP. Fisheries now represent significant global trade. However, over US \$90 billion per year is being lost annually from global fisheries owing to poor governance and management. Improved fisheries management can increase profits from the world's marine fisheries by 200% versus what can be expected under a "business-as-usual" approach.

Even while Myanmar's offshore fisheries are over-exploited, it is widely recognized that poorly performing fisheries can be turned around fast. Recovering Myanmar's stocks represents a significant opportunity for economic development through the creation of business opportunities, jobs and benefit sharing. Outward economic migration can be countered and livelihoods and human well-being improved. Global markets are increasingly demanding sustainable fisheries products. Accessing these markets offers significant growth potential for responsible businesses and presents an opportunity to diversify away from dominant regional fisheries markets.

2. MODERNISE POLICIES AND LAWS

Out-dated laws govern Myanmar's offshore fisheries and predate the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Myanmar's fisheries laws are silent on management planning, stakeholder consultation and decision-making, research and management rules. The Department of Fisheries (DoF) acts primarily on issues related to licencing. It pursues and publishes annual targets, which render a fixed increase in annual production and revenue figures unrelated to the realities of the sub-sector.

Modernizing the laws, and harmonizing with others, would enable fisheries regulation that identifies, monitors, and sustainably manages Myanmar's stocks. It is critical to move from largely unregulated and generically managed fisheries to discreet, secure and regulated fisheries. Adopting and implementing the National Plan of Action (NPOA) to deter, combat and eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (NPOA-IUU) would ensure the effective implementation of fisheries management. Securing legal and safe working conditions are of paramount importance to minimize existing human rights transgressions. Under an improved legal framework, stock recovery and increased value capture can be achieved.

"The Ocean is the health of our life and survival, and we are the ones who can safeguard the health of the Ocean."

Offshore fishermen, Kyaukpyu TS, Rakkhine, 2015

3. IMPROVE FISHERY MANAGEMENT

Integrated, ecosystem-based and spatial planning approaches to offshore fisheries management can serve to secure the recovery and management of stocks. Budget allocations to support fisheries management in Myanmar have historically been limited. The lack of a division tasked with the implementation of the fisheries management framework has resulted in IUU fishing practices. A lack of research and knowledge and weak enforcement compounds the challenge.

THE OCEAN'S TREMENDOUS POTENTIAL

Relative to BAU



**MORE
FOOD**

23% more in harvests per year

**+17
MMT/year**



**MORE
PROFIT**

315% more in profits per year

**+\$90 billion
USD/year**



**MORE
FISH**

112% more fish biomass in water

**+782
MMT/year**

INTEGRATED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Various integrated approaches exist to manage fisheries and resources that aim to improve the benefits that society receives from harvesting fish. Highlighted are the Ecosystem Approach to Fishery Management (EAFM), Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Integrated Resource Governance (IRG). Each approach works by bringing together people and institutions to participate in decision-making and how best to distribute benefits from fisheries whilst maintaining fish stocks. Each technique balances ecological and social wellbeing for sustainable development.

The elements of effective fisheries management are well-understood: key practices include partner-driven mechanisms to evaluate the status of stocks; designing appropriate management measures to limit fishing mortality; and enforcing regulations to prevent or reduce negative fishing impacts. Additional measures can include 1) a cap on fishing effort in line with agreed carrying capacity; 2) management plans for diminished and shared stocks; 3) secure tenure; 4) recovery plans for Endangered, Threatened and Protected species (marine mammals, turtles, sharks and rays); 5); buy-back schemes; and 6) adaptive management to ensure monitoring and research to inform decision making.

4. STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES

Very few DoF staff have been trained specifically in fisheries research and management, or law enforcement work, and no dedicated budget or institutional arm exists to implement Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS). It is estimated that fishery officers dedicate less than 5% of their professional attention to law enforcement duties. Without an institutional structure that articulates clear tasks and responsibilities for sustainable management and enforcement, unsustainable and IUU fishing will not be prevented.

The blueprint for the development of a national MCS system is provided in the 2015 NPOA-IUU. Reform within the DoF could be achieved by initiating a similar approach to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, which adopted an organizational development review. Improved knowledge of required DoF competencies and institutional capacity would enable informed dialogue and cooperation between bilateral and government agencies and partners. Securing donor support for long-term organizational development and capacity development would enable the implementation of robust research and a professional inspectorate to support MCS.

CONCLUSIONS

Myanmar's offshore fish stocks need rebuilding. Weak rule of law has driven the decline; securing improvements in governance will be challenging. Implementing appropriate management can increase economic value from offshore fisheries for Myanmar's people.

Myanmar's democratic government offers hope. Holistic approaches to fisheries management should be implemented that consist of:

- Partnerships that include all stakeholders in planning and decision-making.
- Improved management through integrated, ecosystem-based and spatial approaches.
- Efforts to recover offshore fisheries to provide economic development, jobs and food security.
- Modernization of laws to eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing.
- Institutional reforms to unlock the full potential of Myanmar's offshore fisheries.

“We have all consumed and exploited the fisheries resources and had a heyday. Now we have a responsibility and accountability to secure their recovery.”

U San Kyaw Hla – Offshore fishermen from the Rakhine Fisheries Partnership, 2015

5. DEVELOP EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Fisheries partnerships offer mechanisms to support improvements in marine governance in Myanmar and for rebuilding fish stocks. Opportunities exist to develop multi-sector partnerships between the DoF, fishers and fish-workers, the navy, maritime police, Ministry of Transport, Myanmar Fisheries Federation, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and NGOs. Partnerships at international levels, with bi- and multilateral agencies, also offer opportunities to acquire support to rebuild and sustainably manage offshore fish stocks. Partnerships that encourage increased stakeholder participation and transparent decision-making can ensure management measures, such as seasonal closures, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and fishing gear restrictions are agreeable to resource users.

Partnerships that encourage and support responsible business practices can also enable fish stock recovery, improve operational efficiency and increase post-harvest value. Partnership-driven improvements can create opportunities for more jobs, which can also directly benefit vulnerable groups and women. Through transparent decision-making and collective action, multiple benefits can be captured for Myanmar's people, economy and environment.

PURPOSES

This brief presents an overview of issues affecting offshore fisheries in Myanmar. It describes:

1. The need for improved marine governance and partnerships to rebuild offshore fish stocks;
2. The social and economic value of a sustainably managed offshore fishery for the people of Myanmar;
3. Opportunities to strengthen laws and institutional capacities for sustainable management of fisheries.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Win Ko Ko, Department of Fisheries
- Aung Htay Oo, Department of Fisheries
- Swe Thwin, Myanmar Fisheries Federation
- Aung Aung Naing, Pyoe Pin
- Martin Callow, Wildlife Conservation Society
- Gareth Johnstone, WorldFish
- Gilles Hosch, Trade Development Program (EU)
- Rudolf Hermes, Food and Agricultural Organization

KEY REFERENCES

- IMR. Cruise Report. Myanmar Ecosystem Survey (2014)
- Department of Fisheries. Myanmar Fisheries Statistics (2015)
- National Plan of Action on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (2016)
- Hilborn, R., and Melnychuk, M. Fishery prosperity roadmap (2015)
- Costello, C., et al. Global fishery (2016)
- UCSB/EDF. The potential for global fish recovery (2015)
- Staples, D. & Funge-Smith, S. Ecosystem approach to fisheries (2009)

Disclaimer: The recommendations and opinions expressed in the policy brief are entirely those of the participants and not necessarily those of the parent organization.

DONORS



OTHER SPONSORS



MYANMAR FISHERIES PARTNERSHIP

