

## COUNTRY REPORT FOR SRI LANKA

### Executive summary

Virtually every fishing nation has difficulties in managing its marine resources, particularly those nations that have productive waters and high value living and non-living resources. With respect to fishery resources, the principal difficulties stem from illegal fishing by foreign fishing vessels (poaching), use of illegal gear, fishing in closed areas, transshipment at sea, dumping of by-catch, fishing without licences, and the misreporting of catch information. Nations that have not established a well thought out fisheries MCS programme experience some or all of these difficulties, but it is only after introducing an effective MCS programme that the magnitude of these problems become most evident.

Sri Lanka, as an island in the Indian Ocean, has sovereign rights over a large and extremely valuable EEZ of 517 400 km<sup>2</sup>, which is more than Japan (480 500 km<sup>2</sup>), Malaysia (475 600 km<sup>2</sup>), Myanmar (509 000 km<sup>2</sup>) or Namibia (500 000 km<sup>2</sup>). However, there is no established fisheries MCS and Search and Rescue Programme in place for proper control and management of the exploration, exploitation and conservation of the natural resources – both living and non-living – in the Sri Lankan EEZ. This has caused difficulties in managing its fish resources, specially in preventing poaching by foreign fishing vessels.

The Government of Sri Lanka has identified an urgent need for an MCS and Air-Sea Rescue System. The National Fisheries Development Master Plan states that the MCS system:

“Will be established with the collaboration of the Navy and the Air Force and with the close participation of fishermen. This will be done through a cost-effective network using communication equipment such as satellite navigators on board the fishing vessels and a central control facility. The objective of this will be to protect the country's marine resources and the fishers from sea pirates and to help fishers in distress at sea. The multi-day fishermen who lose their bearings and accidentally stray into waters of India and the Maldives will greatly benefit from this scheme. Foreign funds and technical assistance will be sought for this project.”

### 1. LOCATION

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean, located between latitude 5°55' and 9°51' N and longitude 79°41' and 81°54' E. It is about 100 km southeast from the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent.

### 2. THE EEZ OF SRI LANKA

The Government of Sri Lanka proclaimed its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in 1976 under Act No. 22 of 1976, which expanded to 517 400 km<sup>2</sup> the area of over which Sri Lanka claims sovereign and exclusive rights to explore and exploit the natural resources. In 1982, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sanctioned coastal States jurisdiction over

their EEZ and imposed obligations on these States for the proper management and control of the resources in their EEZ.

### 3. FISHERY RESOURCE

According to past stock assessment surveys, the total biomass of the coastal areas is estimated at around 400 000 t, and the annual maximum sustainable yield (MSY) has been estimated at around 250 000 t.

The offshore/deep-sea fisheries consist of the large migratory species. The potential exploitation limit in the area has been estimated at around 90 000 t/yr. Deep-sea lobsters and cuttlefish of high commercial value have been detected, but these have yet to be exploited.

### 4. ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

Environmental degradation, e.g., discharge of contaminated waters by domestic and foreign vessels, pollutants and other non-biodegradable materials (such as oil spills), is a major problem confronting the country.

Similarly, overfishing, fishing in proscribed areas and use of unauthorized gears and methods all have major impacts on natural resources, which requires immediate attention. These major infringements have many cost-recoverable aspects that Sri Lanka could impose if there were a proper surveillance and enforcement system.

### 5. SECURITY BACKGROUND

Drifting of Sri Lankan fishing boats into the waters of neighbouring nations due to rough weather conditions and mechanical defects are also major problems confronted by the country in past years. Sometimes the fishermen get jail terms in these countries before they are finally repatriated. Therefore solidarity between these countries is needed to solve such situations smoothly.

The economic cost to the country in terms of loss of life and property and expenditure incurred to bring them back to the country are given in Table 1.

**Table 1** Costs associated with search and rescue and repatriation for fishers

Year	No. of boats drifted	No. of boats rescued	No. of fishers rescued	Direct cost to Government of Sri Lanka (SL Rs)	Estimated total loss (SL Rs millions)
1991	16	16	46	114 770	19
1992	81	74	307	1 000 000	102
1993	71	58	85	7 600 000	93
1994	24	24	72	400 000	33
1995	108	96	382	100 000	136

## **6. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES**

- Prevention of illegal foreign fishing (poaching) vessels and their intrusion into EEZ (Section 6 of Act No. 2 of 1996 and Sections 4 and 5 of Act No. 59 of 1979)
- Prevention of entry into prohibited and unauthorized areas within the EEZ (Sections 28 and 29 of Act No. 2 of 1966)
- Prevention of exit of local vessels out of the EEZ into prohibited areas and waters of other nations.
- Preventing use of illegal fishing gears, transshipment at sea and dumping of by-catch.
- Prevention of fishing without a licence (Section 6 of Act No. 2 of 1996 and Section 4 of Act No. 59 of 1979).
- Prevention of pollution and to preserve the ecological balance within the EEZ.
- Protection of nearshore/offshore facilities.
- Preventing illegal immigration.
- Effective anti-smuggling operations.
- Distress-response aspects such as search and rescue and other related operations.
- Monitoring, intercepting and enforcing measures against any unauthorized activity and provision of coastline protection.
- Identification and demarcation of zones based on a maximum utilization programme for effective operational implementation.

## **7. IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE OF THE MCS PROGRAMME**

The immediate objective of the MCS Programme is to provide a multi-tasking airborne MCS and search and rescue system to ensure sovereign control over the EEZ, for the management, regulation, conservation and development of fisheries and aquatic resources and assist fishermen in trouble at sea.

## **8. MONITORING SYSTEM**

The monitoring system includes both airborne surveillance systems for aircraft coverage of the sovereign EEZ waters, and a land-based global positioning system (GPS) for stations to monitor vessel movements using satellite and radio tracking technology and computer software. The system has two Beech King aircraft, Litton v5 radar navigation system, photographic equipment, ground support system and night-time illumination system. This system will provide comprehensive coverage of foreign fleet activity within the EEZ.

## **9. COMMUNICATION SYSTEM**

The communication system encompasses radio and an electronic (e.g., computer, fax) network, with a primary focus on radio communications between vessels at sea, surveillance aircraft, etc., with real-time information delivery to control stations and headquarters. This system is equipped with the necessary electronic equipment and computers.

## 10. SEARCH AND RESCUE SYSTEM

The search and rescue system provides the vessels and service facilities required to protect the fishermen when in distress, and for monitoring the natural resources use, including such requirements as patrolling and apprehending at sea.

The system has two patrol vessels, a surface vessel and a work boat, and computers. It uses the existing radio direction finding (RDF) stations of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development, sited in Colombo (MFAR Building); Beruwala; Galle; Dondra; Hambantota; Negombo; Wennappuwa; and Kalpitiya. All stations operate 24 hours a day. The use of the communications centre in Colombo (Control) will enable all information received from vessels to be relayed from regional sites to the Central Unit and vice versa.

The communication system will be responsible for coordinating MCS-Search and Rescue Vessel activities with the airborne surveillance system. In very urgent situations, both aircraft will be deployed with quickly inflatable life-rafts to the trouble spot.

All motorized fishing vessels will be required to carry GPS equipment on board and to radio their position to regional stations at established times. The tracking of the domestic fishing fleet can thus be monitored at the communication control stations utilizing computer software. The location of all domestic vessels is then known to the MFAR. The location of vessels which drift beyond the EEZ or fish illegally is monitored continuously for this purpose. It is expected to frame regulations to make it mandatory for all offshore fishing vessels to install radio communication and satellite navigational systems. It is expected to introduce amendments to existing regulation framed in 1981 under Act No. 59 of 1979, governing installation of radio communication and satellite navigation systems in vessels. It will be a condition for issuing a licence to foreign fishing vessels.

An enforcement unit will be set up, and empowered under Act No. 59 of 1979 to handle all activities in relation to violations by foreign fishing vessels within the EEZ, which, *inter alia*, includes:

- stopping, boarding and searching any foreign fishing vessel in Sri Lankan waters;
- making inquiries to ascertain whether any offence has been committed by fishing vessels, particularly by foreign fishing vessels;
- seizing and detaining any boat used for illegal activities;
- arresting any person where there is reason to believe that they have committed an offence;
- using force as may be reasonably necessary in effecting the seizure of a boat;
- appearing before a Judge of the High Court and initiating prosecution action;
- effecting forfeitures on vessels, equipment, cargo and taking possession of any boat, fishing gear, fish or aquatic plant cargo and selling or disposing of it as may be thought fit.

## 11. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

In the first year of activities it is expected to consolidate and strengthen existing the Radio Communication Network under the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development; and to upgrade the equipment of the existing Radio Communication Network, instal MCS-airborne search and rescue programme, and procure equipment.