

A mobile licensing service for Timor-Leste's small-scale fisheries

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Mobile licensing service

The Department of General Fishing Inspection of the National Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NDFA) in partnership with the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP), has launched a Mobile Licensing Service for fishing boats. From October 2011, the licensing team travelled to 192 fishing centers and visited every district of Timor-Leste. There they registered almost every fishing boat currently operative in the country. 1,324 licences, were issued to boats requiring them while a further 1,541 smaller non-motorized boats were also registered. Information on all the boats has been inputted into a publicly accessible online system (www.peskador.org) where it forms a national census of fishing effort.



The challenge: legal provisions for the issuance of fishing licenses under the Timor-Leste fisheries law

Provisions under the fishing laws of Timor-Leste establish the need for certain fishing boats (those with engines) to obtain a fishing license. However the process to obtain one is complex. Fishers wanting a license would have to go to the national office of the National Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NDFA) in the capital Dili. Once there they had to fill out a complex form detailing the characteristics of the boat and details of the owner(s) and submit it to the Department of Fisheries Inspection. Once received, one member of staff from the Department would have to travel to the district to carry out an inspection of the boat. Afterwards, the owner was given a receipt which he/she had to take to the bank, make a USD 5 payment and then return with the invoice to the NDFA. Finally, when all the procedures had been carried out the license would be issued by the NDFA. Given the high level of illiteracy in Timor-Leste and especially amongst fishers, the poor means of transportation and the long distances from most coastal areas to Dili, the number of boats legally licensed was previously very limited with licenses issued to just eight non-commercial fishing boats with some 400 boats registered. Although the price of the license could be met by many fishers, the procedures to obtain the license were costly and time consuming, resulting in additional loss of income from missed days at sea fishing. In addition, the database of license information was neither securely stored, nor publicly available.

The mobile licensing team

NDFA, with support from RFLP, decided to form a mobile licensing team in order to make the licensing procedure simpler and more effective. This team also facilitated the gathering of a wide range of other fisheries-related data from communities. A six-strong team was established comprising two staff in charge of boat inspection and marking, two for data gathering, one to manage the finances and one to issue boat licenses. The team provides a one-stop service much needed by fishers. RFLP helped equip the team with basic equipment including a generator, laptop, printers, a



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laminator, and geo-referenced camera. RFLP also helped the team coordinate its visits with that of an awareness raising team. This visited the communities a week before the mobile licensing team and explained to communities the need for basic fisheries management to help fishers better understand the need for licensing. NDFA District Fisheries Officers also played a role in helping to mobilize the communities.

When the mobile teams visited the fishing centres, they first helped every fisher with a boat to fill out a form detailing basic characteristics such as the owner/operator's name, vessel length, year built, type/materials, fishing techniques used etc.

A registration number was then be marked on every boat: spray painted for non-motorized canoes and with an acrylic plate for motorized boats. A photo of the boat and owner was then taken with a geo-referenced enabled camera, making sure that the registration number was clearly visible.

For the motorized boats requiring licenses fishers pay the USD 5 fee and are issued a receipt. They were helped to fill in the license application which was officially stamped and the license issued on the spot.

On their return from the field the information gathered was entered into the National Fisheries Statistical Database www.peskador.org where it is publically available. The geo-referenced photographs boats/owners are also uploaded into Google Earth so that their exact location can be recorded and seen.

The benefits to the fishers and boat owners:

- Saves time and money as they no longer have to travel to Dili to obtain a license.
- Enhances fisher safety by facilitating search and rescue operations.
- By having the chance to interact with government staff, fishers can gain greater understanding of the need for fisheries management.

The benefits to fisheries planners, government institutions, natural resource managers and researchers:

- By facilitating a simpler and more effective data gathering process a far more comprehensive data set can be built comprising a variety of information on fishing boats and owners and locations.
- Comprehensive data such as number of boats, gear types used, ages of boats etc., helps facilitate better fisheries planning and management.
- Inclusion of boat details in the central database can greatly facilitate search and rescue operations or identifying where boats may have originated from.
- The mobile licensing team helps facilitate interaction, engagement and relationships between government and fishers.

RFLP co-management strategy

RFLP is building the foundation for fisheries management by involving the end resource users, traditional leaders and national authorities as equal partners in the data gathering, development of management plans, fisheries policies and enforcement. This approach is part of the RFLP Timor-Leste co-management strategy which brings together and actively engages all the stakeholders in the sustainable use of Timor-Leste's coastal and marine resources.

