

Without Fishing Tradition Brazil Gets Brand New Fisheries Ministry

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Brazil's President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, signed July 29, in the city of Salvador, capital of the Brazilian northeastern state of Bahia, a provisory measure turning the Special Secretariat of Aquaculture and Fishery (Seap) into a ministry. The signing took place during the launch of the National Fishery and Aquaculture Development Plan.

Lula stated that the new ministry is going to have a larger structure, more employees and may even have superintendences in different states in order to "properly define fishery." The president described as "shameful" the fact that Brazil produces only one million tons of fish per year, whereas countries with smaller coastlines have larger outputs. One example is Peru, which produces nine million tons.

According to the Seap, the ministry is going to have a higher budget and its own personnel. Currently, the organization has 200 employees, mostly borrowed or outsourced. The hiring of 200 temporary technicians has already been authorized. Thus, the new ministry will have at least 400 employees.

The ministry is going to be in charge of managing the entire fishery production chain, which entails dividing, for example, the task of administering fishery (setting the amount per species and the time period during which fishing will be allowed) with the Ministry of Environment.

The minister of Aquaculture and Fisheries, Altemir Gregolin, stated that the government is going to allocate 1,750 billion reais (US\$ 1 billion) for the national plan until 2011, a figure five times higher than the amount invested four years ago.

With the national plan, the aim is to expand fish production by 40% until 2011, from one million tons a year to 1.4 million tons a year, 25% of which should come from fishing and 75% from fish farms, according to Gregolin.

In order to attain those goals, the government intends to build 20 public fishing terminals, 120 integrated small-scale fishing centers, with structures for ice factories turned to storage to be installed, fish farming at 40 water reservoirs of the Federal government, and lines of credit totaling 1.5 billion reais (US\$ 953 million) for modernizing fishing vessels.

The plan also forecasts measures to foster fish consumption among Brazilians, such as providing training for school cooks to encourage children to eat more fishery products. The government wants to increase annual consumption from the current seven kilograms per person to nine kilograms. "We want to turn fish into the chicken of the waters of our Brazil, in terms of profitability," stated the minister.

