

Letter from Santarém in Defense of the Artisanal Fisheries of the Lower Amazon, Pará

The artisanal fishers of the Lower Amazon have made important achievements over the last 25-30 years, product of the organized pressure of the regional movement of fishers and their partners in civil society and government. These achievements have included the legal recognition of their community fishing agreements, legalization of floodplain (or varzea as called locally) communities and closed season unemployment insurance.

Fisheries Management: Beginning in the 1980s, fishing communities and their Colonias (municipal fishers' unions) mobilized to protect floodplain lake fisheries from the pressure of large scale commercial fishers. Communities negotiated fishing agreements that defined rules of access and use of fish resources in varzea lakes. Initially, IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Natural Resources) rejected these agreements as illegal. However, in the 1990s Ibama began to collaborate with fisher organizations to define criteria and procedures for the legal recognition of community fishing agreements (Portaria No. 48 of November 5th, 2007).

With the creation of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture (MPA), responsibility for fisheries management was transferred from Ibama to the MPA. However, the MPA never assumed responsibility for fisheries management and the agreement for shared management with IBAMA never functioned in practice. In some cases individual states took responsibility for fisheries management, but the fisheries co-management policy was abandoned. The state of Pará never assumed responsibility for fisheries management and the result was the virtual abandonment of fisheries management by federal, state and municipal governments. Currently, there is no monitoring or effective enforcement of fishing activity nor support for the fishing agreements approved by IBAMA and later integrated into the Utilization Plans of varzea Agroextractive Settlement Projects (PAEs).

Now the government has extinguished the MPA and is transferring the functions to a Secretariat of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAPA), the Ministry responsible for agribusiness and without competence or interest in managing artisanal fisheries. This decision is simply the final step in the marginalization of the Amazon's artisanal fisheries.

Land Tenure Regularization: One of the great problems the floodplain residents face is the lack of legal recognition of their land holdings and of community territories. In 2006, with the signature of an MOU between the Secretariat of Federal Patrimony (SPU) and the Institute for Colonization and Agrarian reform (INCRA), the latter institute began implementation of a land tenure regularization policy based on the Agro-extractive Settlement, a type of settlement designed for traditional peoples. INCRA created 41 varzea PAEs with a population of 70,000 people in 8 municipalities of the

Lower Amazon. Utilization Plans were approved that integrated community fishing agreements and presented rules for land and resource use of each PAE.

However, the regularization process was never concluded and in recent years groups inside and outside of the government began to propose the cancelling of varzea PAEs and the recognition of individual rather than collective properties, a move that favors large land holdings. This proposal represents a threat to fishers and their communities who depend on lakes, many of which are located within these properties. This situation not only threatens to undermine community management of lake fisheries but also the subsistence base of floodplain fishers.

Closed Season Unemployment Insurance (SD): In 191 the federal government created a program to encourage compliance with the closed fishing season through the concession of one minimum salary per month during this period. In the following years, fishers' access to this benefit was facilitated and consequently led to the progressive increase in the number of fishers receiving the benefit. This measure has had a number of impacts. First it was a strong incentive for fishers to respect the closed season, contributing to the conservation of fish resources. Second, the measure stimulated fishers to seek the government identification documents required to receive the SD, helping to transform fishers into full citizens able to access all the benefits to which citizens had a right. Finally, it contributed to the growth and strengthening of the Fishers' Colonies, improving their capacity to represent their members.

With the decision of the Interministerial Decree (Portaria) no. 192, shortly before the start of the Closed Season, the government will eliminate one of the last measures which exists to encourage fishers to conserve fish resources in the context of the abandonment of fisheries management policy. This measure leaves fish resources unprotected, since along with this measure the government also suspended the closed fishing season. This measure also has a significant impact on the family economy of artisanal fishers who now have little time to adjust to the loss of this income, as well as creating a negative impact on the varzea ecosystem.

Considering what has been presented here, the organizations named below, participants of the seminar "Fisheries Development on the Lower Amazon Varzea", held on October 14th and 15th, 2015, in the Emaus Training Center in Santarém, present the following proposals to be implemented in the Lower Amazon region.

1. Closed Season Unemployment Insurance:

1.1. Revoke section VI of Article 1° of the Interministerial Decree nº 192 of 10/05/2015. The SD has been one of the few measures the government currently has for the conservation of fish resources. The SD is just compensation for fishers who suspend their activities during the closed season to ensure the reproduction of important commercial species and maintenance and recover of fish stocks.

2. Management of Artisanal Fisheries:

2.1. Revoke the decree that extinguished the MPA. Despite its deficiencies, we consider the maintenance of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture to be essential for the sustainable development of the artisanal fisheries sector, especially that of continental waters. It is essential that in the future the MPA not be used simply as a prize for the parties allied with the government and as a source of employment for their members. It is critical that the MPA be led by fisheries professionals and not suffer constant changes in leadership to attend political demands.

2.2. Resume fisheries management policies: The greatest threat to artisanal fisheries is the abandonment of fisheries management policies. It is critical to the recovery of fish stocks that the inter-ministerial term of cooperation between the Ministry of Environment and the MPA be revised to structure a secure institutional base for the development and implementation of a new national policy for fisheries co-management based on the partnership between government agencies responsible for monitoring and enforcement and local fisher organizations, where the government ensures effective support for the co-management systems developed by fisher communities and regional organizations.

2.3. Create a program of Community Environmental Agents: A key element of a co-management policy is the development and implementation of a program to train Community Environmental Agents who can educate fishers and other citizens regarding the importance of sustainable management, coordinate local monitoring activities and collaborate with government agents in enforcing fishing regulations. A program for Community Environmental Agents is a central component of a co-management policy and the most effective way to integrate local groups of fishers into the sustainable management of their natural resources.

2.4. Separate capture fisheries from Aquaculture: Aquaculture and capture fisheries have the potential to complement each other increasing fish production and fisher incomes. However, we do not accept that fisheries management be abandoned based on a belief that the objective of fisheries development is the development of aquaculture. Artisanal fisheries are a separate activity which, in addition to providing high quality fish products, contributes to the conservation of the freshwater and marine ecosystems that sustain fisheries resources.

2.5. Implant a system of fisheries statistics to inform the implementation of policies for the fisheries sector:

One of the major problems faced by artisanal fisheries is the poor quality of the data available, a result of the minimal effort made by the government to collect reliable data on fishing activities and the state of fish resources. The sustainable management of fish resources depends on a program of fisheries statistics that provides fishers and fisheries managers with the quality and quantity of information they need to make informed decisions. The lack of such information on fisheries production, employment and income is responsible for the minimal attention that the sector receives from federal, state and municipal governments.

3. Regularization of the Land tenure status of Varzea PAEs:

Complete the collective regularization of Varzea PAEs: This process, which has been stalled since 2010, consolidates the role of the varzea PAE as the primary territorial unit for managing amazon floodplains and ensuring the well-being of the traditional populations which live in them. In this way PAEs provide a legal base for a development policy based on the sustainable management of the natural resources of the floodplain.

3.1. Renew the Term of Cooperation between the SPU and INCRA: As the first step, INCRA, Terra Legal and the SPU should renew the term of technical cooperation for implementing the procedures involved in the collective regularization Varzea PAEs to be executed beginning in 2016. To ensure the effective participation of varzea communities working group should be created which includes the State Public Ministry, the Forum of Varzea PAEs, Sapopema, Federal University of Western Pará (UFOPA), Colônia de Pescadores Z-20 of Santarém, the STTR (rural labor union), MOPEBAM (fishers' movement of the Lower Amazon) the CPP and the federation of Agricultural workers (FETAGRI), to accompany all the steps in the regularization of the PAEs.

3.2. Implement the Collective CAR for Varzea PAEs: The collective CAR with the identification of each resident and family and the areas they use is an essential document to enable PAE residents to access public policies and specific government actions in support of varzea families.

3.3. Immediate emission of Contracts for the Concession of Real Use Rights (CCDRU) for varzea PAEs.

IN addition to concluding the process of land tenure regularization, there is a series of issues which need to be resolved.

1. Expand the ATER (rural extension) program to all varzea PAEs. A The majority of varzea PAEs do not have access to technical assistance for the development of productive activities and the sustainable management of their natural resources.

This technical assistance is essential to ensuring the efficient and sustainable use of the productive potential of varzea PAEs. We demand the publication of a call for contracting technical assistance for all varzea POPAEs that are without such support.

2. **Resume the provision of agricultural credit to residents of varzea PAEs.** These benefits are essential to the development of productive activities in varzea PAEs and the growth and diversification of family incomes.

The Organizations signed below:

1. Colônia de Pescadores Z- 20 Santarém
2. Colônia de Pescadores Z– 19 Óbidos
3. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 11 Monte Alegre
4. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 42 Juruti
5. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 66 Curuá
6. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 28 Alenquer
7. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 31 Prainha
8. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 52 Aveiro
9. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 41 Oriximiná
10. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 33 Almeirim
11. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 75 Terra Santa
12. Colônia de Pescadores Z – 56 Itaituba
13. MOPEBAM – Movimento dos Pescadores do Baixo Amazonas
14. Fórum de PAEs de Várzea
15. SAPOPEMA/IDEPA – Sociedade Para a Pesquisa e Protecao do Meio Ambiente
16. Earth Innovation Institute
17. UFOPA – Universidade Federal do Oeste do Pará
18. Projeto Saúde Alegria
19. Conselho Pastoral de Pescadores
20. CEFTBAM – Centro de Formacao dos Trabalhadores do Baixo Amazonas
21. Instituto Hiléia
22. Sindicato dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras Rurais de Santarém

23. Industria Pesqueira (Edifrigo)
24. FETAGRI - Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura – Regional Baixo-Amazonas
25. Sindicato dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras do Município de Juruti
26. NAEA- Núcleo de Altos Estudos Amazônicos da Universidade Federal do Pará
27. Senador Paulo Rocha - PT
28. Deputado Federal José Geraldo - PT
29. Deputado Estadual Ailton Faleiro – PT
30. Vereadora Ana Elvira de Mendonça Alho – PT
31. Vereadora Maria Ivete Bastos dos Santos – PT
32. Vereador Henderson Lira Pinto – DEM
33. Vereador José Maria Junior Pereira Tapajós - PMDB