

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ErgoMare

**5-7 October 2006
Lorient, France**

The work of sea fishermen is and remains one of the most dangerous of occupations. Faced with this fact, the Maritime Institute of Prevention and the University of South Brittany decided to organise and conduct in Lorient an international symposium ErgoMare, and to bring together representatives of European and other research institutes in which studies on the health and work safety problems of fishermen have been conducted, to confront their knowledge and exchange experiences in this field. The objective of this meeting was to formulate new approaches and propose actions aimed at better safety and the improvement of conditions of work of fishermen.

ErgoMare was planned as a follow-up of three previously conducted symposia on the safety and working conditions of fishermen: the international symposium held in Lorient in 1984, the international seminar held in Rimouski in Canada in 1989, and the symposium in Bamio held in 1992.

Many organizations and institutions supported ErgoMare, and among them were: the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Labour Office (ILO), and the ENIM (National Bureau for Disabled Maritime Personnel), as well as the French Ministries of Agriculture, Fisheries and Transport, the Brittany Region, and the Morbihan Department.

The event was placed under the high patronage of Mr. Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission, and the EEC Commissioner in charge of Transport and the Safety of Ships and Navigation Mr. Joe Borg, Member of the European Commission in charge of Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, and Mr. Vladimir Spidla, European Commissioner in charge of Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity.

There were 200 participants of the ErgoMare symposium from 20 countries, mainly from France, Norway, USA, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Morocco, Canada and the Netherlands.

Forty speakers covered the following themes:

- The analysis of maritime casualties, workplace accidents and occupational diseases of fishermen,
- Resource management policy and safety of work at sea,
- Safety and health of fishermen in developing countries,
- Risk perception and risk management on board fishing vessels,
- Training for the prevention of workplace accidents and injuries,
- The integration of safety into vessel design and the development of fishing technologies.

The ErgoMare Symposium was, as a meeting of professionals all sharing and confronting their knowledge, an international forum of dialogue of experts, and an example of interaction between scientific disciplines.

Out of this exchange of experiences and confrontation of views, three main problems emerged, three keys to safety of work on fishing vessels.

First of all, several speakers from different institutions pointed out the impact of regulations on the work safety of fishermen. Up to the present times, most European regulations developed by the Directorates-General of Fisheries or Maritime Affairs had as their main objective the protection of the resources through a restriction of the fishing activity. To fulfil this aim, several measures were taken, including the creation of TACs and Quotas, and the limitations of the authorised volume of the catch.

- The measures limiting authorised fishing were much criticised, both because they did not allow a renewal of the fleet, and because they limited the tonnage of vessels. Too few new vessels are being built to make it possible to plan the integration of safety into their design. It is well known that this would contribute to reducing the number of work accidents and to improving conditions of work of fishermen. According to the tonnage rules, fishermen who plan to build a new vessel must order a smaller one, even though the connection has been shown between the vessel's size and the occurrence of accidents (falling overboard for instance is more frequent on small vessels than on larger ones).
- The impact of the fisheries' management, on safety, and on the economic and social structure of a region, was demonstrated: collective quotas trigger off a "race for fishing", often regardless of safety conditions.

On the other hand, the creation of individual quotas introduced in Alaska has brought about a drop in the number of accidents, and also a "rationalisation" of the fleet, i.e. a significant decrease in the number of vessels and crews.

The different presentations on this theme showed the necessity of assessing the impact of resource protection measures on safety, and of creating the necessary

methodology and tools to achieve this goal. They also showed that no research on safety can neglect the economic aspect, and that safety is a broad concept including the vessel, the men and the economy.

The second problem was reporting of accidents.

Several papers were presented on the subject of “learning from experience”, i.e.: collecting, and analysing data on accidents and acting on the lessons of this experience.

In several countries many events at sea were not reported.

Therefore, it was difficult to estimate the number of accidents, to build up reliable databases. Moreover, better questionnaires for collecting data should be designed to classify accidents and identify their causes.

Also, a need was expressed to share the input from other teams’ experience in the field of risk evaluation.

Learning from experience and evaluation is needed to achieve progress and improvement, as well as a comparison of the existing methods and tools in different countries participating in the symposium.

The third problem was approached by several speakers: wearing of safe working clothes, and the use of life jackets and other protection devices against drowning on fishing vessels.

The papers read by different speakers showed that, for the most part, these protection devices were accessible to all fishermen at a low cost, and were available aboard the vessels, but that they are not always worn. The question is why fishermen do not wear protective devices like integrated life jackets. Two main hypotheses were brought forward, one stressing the ergonomics of the product, the other the psychology of seafarers. A paper showed that seafarers, more than other individuals, tend to neglect the rules. Making compulsory the use of integrated life jackets through regulations would therefore not be the best way to promote their use. Programmes aimed at convincing fishermen to better protect their lives could bring better results.

The Report on ErgoMare symposium, and the Conclusions were contributed by
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