
Colombia: Actions against expansion of industrial shrimp farming

The semi-intensive production system used in shrimp farms located in the Department of Córdoba, in the Atlantic region of Colombia, has caused great disruption in the surrounding environment. Among other things, this system implies the constant dumping of large volumes of water saturated with organic waste into the estuary of the lower basin of the Sinu river.

The shrimp industry established in this estuary in 1982 already covers some 700 hectares and has been an important promoter of the Urrá 1 hydroelectric dam (see WRM Bulletin No. 51). This dam which is already in operation, involved the flooding of over 7,000 hectares of forests, with a direct impact on the means of living and very existence of the Embera Katio indigenous peoples and the fishing communities in the area.

The company managers have everything under control: the hydroelectric plant regulates freshwater inflow, whereby they manage to increase salt water inflow, causing the salinisation of the lands adjacent to the estuary in the Cispata bay. It is estimated that 7,200 hectares of agricultural land are affected by salinisation. The local communities which historically occupied these lands with traditional subsistence crops have abandoned them. And this is precisely what the companies want: to occupy the agricultural lands adjacent to the mangrove ecosystems in order to install their artificial ponds for industrial shrimp breeding.

Attempts at expanding the shrimp industry along the Colombian Caribbean Coast, are being promoted with the complacency and support of the State, through the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Recently an agreement was signed between State bodies and private companies for the establishment of a further 9,000 hectares of shrimp ponds in the Department of la Guajira, to the extreme north of the country and another similar agreement is being prepared for the establishment of 8,000 hectares in the estuaries of the lower basin of the Sinu river.

The Association of Producers for Community Development of the Ciénaga Grande del Bajo Sinu (ASPROCIG) are very concerned over this situation and are considering the preparation of various actions to face it. Contacts have already been established with FUNDECOL in Ecuador, who know only too well the disasters caused by the shrimp industry in the coastal zones of the country.

Depredation is orchestrated. It is sufficient to see how the different systems for the exploitation of resources repeat themselves, with the same noxious social, environmental and economic repercussions. For this reason, orchestration of efforts among those who are affected is essential. Along these lines, ASPROCIG has lodged this complaint with the international community and is making an urgent call for solidarity in the struggle to oppose the commercial interests that are attempting to sweep away their present and their future.

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