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Argentina and Uruguay are wasting sources of protein and labor

With the approval of INIDEP, an annual catch of 120,000 tons of anchovy was authorized, but Argentina only catches about 8,300 tons.



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By César Augusto Lerena (*)



Almost 50 years ago, Argentina harvested 40,000 tons of anchovy (*Engraulis anchoíta*) per year. Processing this species was one of the activities that sparked the growth of a sector that today exports US\$2 billion annually. The harvesting and processing of this species generated a significant number of jobs and provided a source of high-quality protein. Today, the situation is completely different in Argentina and [Uruguay](#).

Both nations, "determined to lay the foundations for the broadest cooperation between the two countries and strengthen the deep-rooted bonds of traditional friendship and deep affection that unite their peoples," signed the Treaty of the Río de la Plata and its Maritime Front in 1973, establishing a Common Fishing Zone, where the anchovy is found. What is done with this species is in the interest of both countries, which should share its catch equally.



With the approval of the National Institute for Fisheries Research and Development (Inidep), a catch of 120,000 tons per year was authorized, but Argentina only catches about 8,300 tons (80% Patagonian) per year, and Uruguay has not caught any and is reportedly considering initiatives to use anchovy for fishmeal production. These are two terrible ways to manage resources and ignore the poverty, unemployment, and malnutrition of both nations.

There are nearly 120,000 tons available that could generate food, employment, and foreign currency. Using anchovy catches for the production of fishmeal is an act of total irresponsibility, absolutely incompatible with the provisions of the Treaty (Articles 74, 80, and 82). It constitutes indirect predation (failing to obtain greater added value from the same catch) and a violation of the Treaty: "the adoption and coordination of plans and measures relating to the conservation, preservation, and rational exploitation of living resources and the protection of the marine environment."

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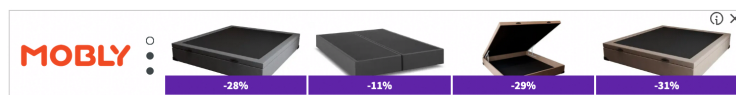
If Uruguay were to use the 60,000 tons of anchovy harvested for fishmeal, it would generate a total of 3,950 days of work per year, although it would be impossible to control the volume, sexual maturity, and size caught (Resolutions 3/02 and 14/14 of the Joint Technical Commission). Conversely, if this harvested volume were used for salting and bulk sale, approximately 264,000 days of work would be generated. If filleting were added to this, it could generate approximately 6,000 additional jobs.



Sending anchovy and other related species to the production of fishmeal is an unacceptable indirect exploitation, so much so that the practice has been banned by the province of Buenos Aires, whose waters are shared within the Common Zone, since 2004. This practice is understood to be aimed at reducing the consumption of anchovy and other species, as "it threatens the sustainability of anchovy and the species that depend on it; it causes higher costs and generates less value compared to the use of its protein for human consumption; it requires less labor."

Incidentally, this Uruguayan action would also affect those resources reserved for Argentina, which is why Ambassador Mariana Llorente, president of the Argentine delegation to the Joint Technical Commission of the Maritime Front, should firmly oppose this Uruguayan initiative. This commission has not done so far, and it is particularly striking because it is composed, in addition to the aforementioned ambassador, of Undersecretary of Fisheries Carlos Liberman; Director of National Institute of Fisheries (INIDEP), Oscar Padín; Director of Planning for the Undersecretariat, Gabriela Navarro; and Representative of the National Executive Branch to the Fisheries Council, Carlos Lasta, a former INIDEP official, Ramiro Sánchez. All of these officials should not ignore this issue.

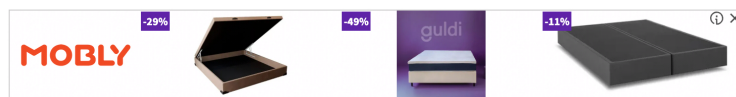
Although it should not attract attention because exploiting only 8,300 tons of the 60,000 available for Argentina reveals a lamentable administrative incapacity of the Undersecretariat of Fisheries of Argentina and a violation of article 1 of Law 24,922: "The Argentine Nation will promote the exercise of maritime fishing in pursuit of maximum development compatible with the rational use of marine living resources (?) obtaining maximum added value and the greatest employment of Argentine labor" because it implies losing an increase of one third of the total number of operators generated by all national fishing activity, in a country with 11.3% unemployment, 19 million poor people, 4.5 million destitute people and millions of people who need excellent quality proteins and the unbeatable unsaturated fats provided by anchovies.



I will not fail to point out that unexploited (surplus) species must also be made available to third countries (UNCLOS Articles 62, 69, 70 and 297), which would be extremely serious, not only from the point of view of resource management, but also due to the loss of nutrients for our people.

It is essential and urgent that both countries implement the FAO Fisheries Code ("fishing should be carried out taking into account the biological, technological, economic, social, and environmental aspects" and "giving priority to the nutritional needs of local communities") and use the available resources responsibly; in my opinion, by promoting and supporting the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises dedicated to the exploitation of this species for direct human consumption, avoiding processing in third countries (the United States, Spain, Peru, France, Morocco, etc.) to ensure employment in Argentina.

Juan Manuel Otero Ferres tells us about this: "In the Cantabrian Sea, France and Spain share an identical resource, but their Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is around 29,000 tonnes per year, that is, 40% less than Uruguay. However, they generate annual global foreign exchange of around 250 million euros with the participation of more than 400 fishing companies that generate more than 35,000 direct jobs." Argentine salted anchovy exports reach a value of US\$ 3,445 per ton, a value higher than hake and squid fillets, according to official values.



In Uruguay, a bill has been dormant for a year (August 30, 2020) in the House of Representatives. It aims to establish new SMEs and cooperatives; promote direct consumption and export of anchovies; professionalize artisanal fishing; create new jobs; utilize the surplus in the production of oils, yeasts, proteins, or soluble concentrates for pharmaceutical or food purposes, etc., and use only the waste for flour.

A similar project in Argentina could lead to the creation of some 25 new companies with an annual production capacity of about 2,000 tons of anchovy and other species each, generating industrial jobs and shipbuilding. However, I must reiterate, the model should be changed because it is poorly managed and squanders resources that all Argentines need

manages and equippers resources that an Argentine never

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