

Observatorio Ciudadano




Courtesy of Annette Paterson

Annual
REPORT
2010

Executive Summary

In late 2009 the Observatorio Ciudadano (Citizen Observatory, OC) project of Plataforma Bahía de La Paz began performing its core mission: patrolling the waters in and near Bahía de La Paz and providing surveillance reports of illegal fishing activities to appropriate authorities, especially those that took place at night—the Pistoleros de la Noche. The success of the first year of operations provides a tantalizing glimpse into the potential for achieving positive outcomes when the focus of activities is helping disparate segments of society collaborate to reach common objectives. Real operations also mean real learning; the first year of operations has now given us a road map for improving and adapting OC and other Plataforma activities to maximize effectiveness in reaching measurable goals: reducing illegal fishing while creating jobs for displaced fishermen.

A large school of fish swimming in the water, viewed from above. The fish are densely packed and appear to be moving in a coordinated pattern. The water is a deep blue color.

OC started patrolling
La Paz waters in June
2009

OC started patrolling La Paz waters in June 2009 with the objective of identifying and reporting illegal fishing activity in real time, especially at night when the majority of the illegal fishing takes place. All relevant authorities are contacted by automated GPS (Spot) technology at the time of the incident. OC patrols then create reports for the appropriate authorities that include photographic and video evidence. Plataforma then files a legal “denuncia” (complaint) against the offenders within 24 hours. Land-based elements of the OC network pursue these complaints through legal channels. In addition, OC has opened a dialog with fishermen on the development of alternatives to illegal fishing, such as introducing farmed scallops into the bay of La Paz, helping fishermen buy boats and motors for ecotourism trips to the Islands, and helping them obtain quality education for their children.

When OC started patrols in June of 2009, there were approximately 21 illegal pangas working as pistoleros (harpooning fish at night while they sleep) and 8 pangas working as encerradores (netting fish), all utilizing hookah, which is now banned.¹ Currently, there are 4 pangas working part time as pistoleros and 1 working as an encerrador. The table below highlights the **minimum** estimated amount of reef fish that have been saved in one year by OC’s and other vigilance efforts. The numbers come from conversations with working and non-working pistoleros and encerradores as well as local fish buyers. Most felt the reduction in fish killed was closer to 700 tons. Higher numbers of spawning fish will help to rejuvenate populations on the local reefs and surrounding areas. To get an idea of what’s been happening on the reefs look at [fish returning to reefs](#).

	Pangas Working	Nightly Catch	Weekly Catch	Weeks Worked/yr	Tons/yr Per Panga	Tons all Pangas
Last Year	29	200 kilos	1000 kilos	20	22 tons	638 tons
Now	5	200 kilos	1000 kilos	20	22 tons	110 tons
Reduction in reef fish killed illegally in La Paz area in last year:						528 tons

¹ Sea Watch attorneys petitioned Mexican federal officials to get a total ban on any fish extraction using hookah. Their work resulted in a new regulation banning compressed air for fish extraction. That regulation went into effect in May of 2009.

² Numbers were verified by currently working and ex pistoleros and fish buyers, all from La Paz area.

OC's stated goal is to perform one 3-day patrol trip per week. Between June 2009 to June 2010, OC performed a total of 25 trips in the Bahia de La Paz area. During this same period, OC witnessed an 80% decrease in observed illegal fishing activity. We estimate that this decrease in illegal activity, during this first year, means between 500 and 700 tons of fish remain on the reefs of Bahia de La Paz that would otherwise be gone. Of course, reef fish reproduce, so changes in reef populations due to changes in illegal fishing activity are magnified over time with exponential benefits.

In addition to direct decreases in illegal fishing, Plataforma presented seven formal legal complaints to fishery and environmental agencies. Other achievements may be more difficult to measure but are still considered tangible results of the initial OC program. These include changes in the attitudes and behaviors of individuals at various institutions that are historically at odds with each other. We have seen more willingness to invest in OC operations from NGO and private sector groups. In addition, we have heard and seen numerous anecdotal reports of more healthy fish populations on the reefs of the bay. Examples, [fish returning to Islotes](#), [Fish returning to San Diego Island](#)


Fish are returning!



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In Summary

Much of the OC program's initial success is due to collaboration between segments of society that usually do not operate in a coordinated way, despite mutual interests and common goals. OC has helped to promote inter-institutional coordination within government, and has also facilitated a relationship with illegal fisherman that enabled Plataforma to understand their motives and offer economic alternatives, a major key to the program's success. OC has triggered a unique government-society collaboration effort that had never taken place before. OC activities provided the catalyst and, in the end, it was the combined vigilance efforts of OC, the governmental agencies of FONMAR and CONANP, as well as local NGOs and the enlightened civil society in the La Paz region that resulted in the saving of well over 500 tons of reef fish during this first year of operation. OC's operational success is being looked at as a model for addressing similar concerns in other areas of coastal Mexico, paving the way for reclaiming the health of our seas.



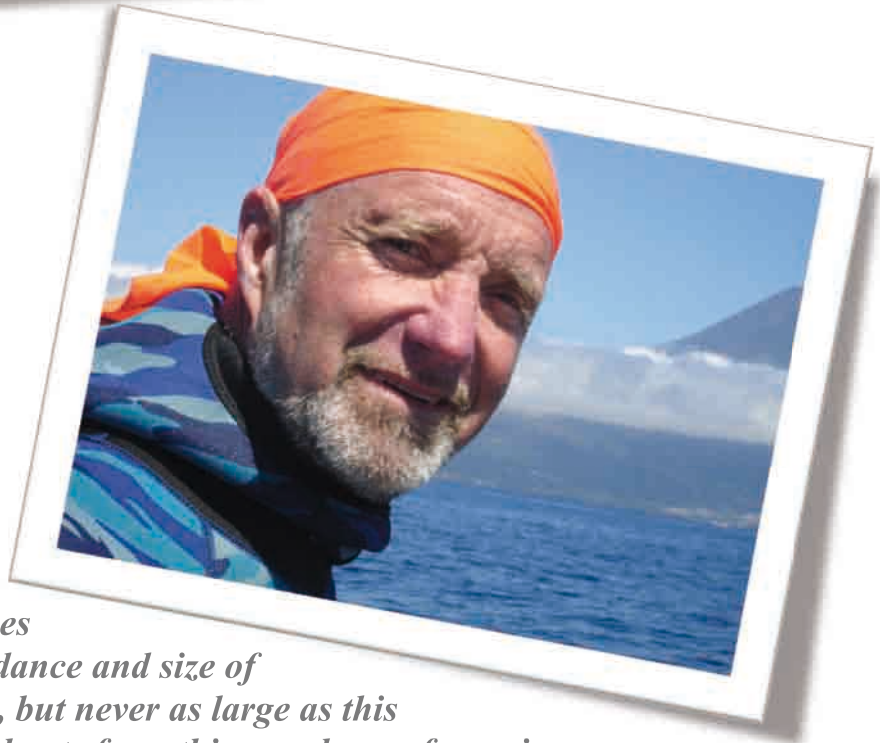
**Help the sea.
Keep on collaborating!**



“We snorkeled Islotes last week and it was the most fish we have seen anywhere in Mexico!”

Bill & Sue Houlihan from SV
“Sun Baby”

“As an underwater photographer and videographer who has been shooting video in the waters around La Paz almost annually in October since 1991, I was very impressed by the massive schools of fish that we saw at Swanee this year. We saw vast schools of mixed grunts including Cortez, spottail, and huge schools of bigeye scad as well as Mexican goatfish so thick that they sometimes obscured the reef itself. The abundance and size of these schools seems to be growing, but never as large as this year. Patrolling to keep now illegal nets from this popular reef area is certainly working..”



Harrison A. Skip Stubbs, Ph.D.



“It has been almost a year since we haven’t seen the pistoleros working at night in this area, although Mexican yachts from La Paz are still shooting fish with tanks”

Joaquin from Los Burros

OBSERVATORIO CIUDADANO 2010



Over 500 tons of reef fish saved this year deserves your support. OC operates on a very small budget with no overhead, so you can rest assured that 100% of your donation goes directly to paying the costs of fuel and the salaries for the three patrol boat operators (approximately \$1200/week). Visit the La Paz area and see for yourself how this program is making a difference each week in the health of local reef ecosystems by encouraging compliance, sustainability and cooperation. We truly appreciate your support.

Donate

