

## World Bank winds up fisheries initiative

**A high-profile World Bank fisheries programme backed by Norway and initiated by former bank chief Robert B Zoellick has been terminated.**

Norway was the largest donor for the aborted fisheries initiative, which aimed at protecting the world's oceans and scaling up fisheries.

Norwegian funds have financed a secretariat at the bank that was set up to develop and gather support for the so-called Global Partnership for Oceans (GPO). The secretariat has now been closed down.

"There no longer is a GPO Secretariat," writes Flore de Préneuf, a spokesperson for the World Bank in an email to *Development Today*.

### FOCUS ON PRIVATISATION

The Bank's management of the GPO initiative has been strongly criticised for focusing too much on privatisation and trade in fish quotas. The fear has been that this could lead to the transfer of fishing rights to commercial companies at the expense of small-scale fisher folk in poor countries. Norway had pushed hard for changes together with other players, but with limited success.

Meanwhile, the support for the fisheries initiative has faded inside the bank with the current World Bank President Jim Yong Kim showing less interest in GPO than his predecessor, *Development Today* is told.

GPO was launched three years ago by then head of the bank Robert Zoellick at a gathering in Singapore, facilitated by the *The Economist*. A few months later Norway pledged USD 2 million in support for the design phase. The United States and the Netherlands contributed smaller amounts.

Norway later held back an additional NOK 10 million due to discontent with how the GPO was developing. Despite numerous discussions between the bank and Norway, which led to some changes, both the aid agency Norad and Norway's Institute of Marine Research gave a thumbs down to the project.

Earlier, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers called on governments to abandon the GPO.

Norad's opinion was that the GPO would probably not contribute to poverty reduction and that the Bank had not included Norwegian positions on overfishing into the programme.

Still, in late 2013, Norway's Foreign Minister Børge Brende decided to support the project, though his decision memo specified that further funding of GPO had to be run by him.

Meanwhile, State Secretary John Kerry pledged that the United States would take the lead in protecting the world's oceans.

Last June, he hosted a huge ocean conference in Washington DC that aimed to kick off global action on oceans. President Barack Obama opened the gathering in a video address.

## **KIM FAILED TO SHOW**

The US move was broad, but it had been expected that the Global Partnership for Oceans would be a theme at this gathering. But that did not happen. Bank President Kim was scheduled to attend the conference and stakeholders waited for him to speak out about his take on the GPO initiative. He cancelled and attended a China-UK Global Economic Round Table at No. 10 Downing Street in London, which took place the same day.

Instead, Managing Director Sri Mulyani Indrawati represented the Bank at the conference in Washington. Participants noticed that Indrawati mentioned GPO, but did not make it a main issue in her presentation. She took the opportunity to thank the United States and Norway for their support to the design phase of GPO.

Brende was also expected to hail GPO in his speech. Transcripts from an email exchange between World Bank staff and Oslo show that Brende would call for more emphasis on poverty reduction in GPO. However, transcripts from the State Department suggest that Brende did not include any reference to GPO in his speech whatsoever.

A spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry in Oslo, Veslemøy Salvesen, confirms that GPO was not a theme for Norway at the conference. Norway's total funding of the initiative is limited to NOK 11.4 million, she says.

The World Bank had strived all along to get new donors onboard to support GPO, but without success. The event in Washington DC suggested that support for GPO was by June luke-warm, even inside the Bank.

## **ADVOCACY PLATFORM**

In a recent document about GPO, circulated at the World Bank, Senior Director Paula Caballero refers to GPO as an "advocacy platform".

This stands in stark contrast to Zoellick's ambition three years earlier. He had expected the Bank, together with GPO partners, to leverage USD 1.5 billion in new funding for ocean-related activities over five years.

The bank's spokesperson De Préneuf writes that the Bank will ramp up its work on fisheries and marine and coastal habitats. It will also target water pollution and marine plastic in its pollution work.

However, GPO will not be the umbrella for these initiatives.

"We will undertake these goals by replenishing our Program for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (PROFISH +) in a broadened capacity," she says.

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