



PSA-004-Seismic Vessel Chased Away-Trinidad

How do we save coral reefs?

Vic Ferguson

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FISHERMEN CHASE AWAY SEISMIC VESSEL

By LAUREL V WILLIAMS Sunday, January 12 2014

FOR the second time in seven months fishermen yesterday mounted a protest on the high seas where drama unfolded on the waters of the Gulf of Paria when Fishermen and Friends of the Sea (F&FS) chased after a seismic vessel.



Up in arms against seismic blasting in the Gulf of Paria, 14 boat-load of fishermen early yesterday morning circled the vessel Sanco Star with their fishing pirogues off the coast of Granville beach. The fishermen's action caused Petrotrin's marine police to intervene to stave off apparent threats to the company's on shore operations in the waters off the south-western coast. The situation got tense in the choppy waters when the fishermen, from several fishing ports along the south-western peninsula, chased after the large red-coloured Sanco Star seismic boat with their fishing pirogues. That happened when the captain of the seismic vessel decided to leave the Gulf waters to a safer part of the sea.

The scene, in which Petrotrin police were forced to surround the seismic vessel to protect it from the fishermen's pirogues, seemed to have mimiced the actions of the world environmental watchdog organisation - Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd - against deep sea trawling and the saviour of whales in the Southern ocean.

From early as 6 am yesterday, the fishermen, led by FFOS' Gary Aboud, gathered at the Otaheite fishing depot where together with media personnel, they boarded several fishing pirogues. Aboud was seated in one and he directed the fishermen on a survey of the gulf waters, an area rich in shrimp and fish and regarded as the fish basket of Trinidad. Petrotrin has been conducting sea blasting as part of a multi-million seismic project in the Gulf waters off the Cedros and Otaheite bays, for oil and gas find. Fishermen in the areas, however, have been protesting the threat from the seismic blasting, to fish stocks, as well as Petrotrin's delay in compensating them.



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In June last year, Cedros and Icacos fishermen led by Gary Edwards of the Icacos United Fishermen, circled two off-shore rigs in the Gulf where they held up placards in protest against the seismic blasting. The Coast Guard and Petrotrin's police were forced to intervene to keep the fishermen away from the rigs

At about 7 am yesterday, the fishermen, in 14 pirogues, drove to Granville Bay and about six miles off-shore, they spotted the seismic vessel Sanco Star used in the blasting. The pirogues attempted to encircle the vessel and almost immediately, Petrotrin police officers swooped in with two patrol boats. They positioned their boats in front and at the side of the seismic vessel. When that happened, the fishing pirogues captain roared their engines and backed the boats a short distance away. Standing on the bow of their vessels with loud speakers, the Petrotrin police officers shouted, "Don't come close! Don't come close!"

Other officers began to take photos of the fishermen in their pirogues and while that was happening, the Sanco Star drove off and headed to the wider ocean. But to the shock and dismay of the company's police officers, the fishermen in their pirogues followed in pursuit after the large vessel. Petrotrin police journeyed alongside but kept shouting in their loudspeakers for the fishermen not to get too close. When the Sanco Star entered rougher waters and appeared to be heading to the wider ocean, the fishermen abandoned their pursuit. The fishermen returned to Otaheite Bay, but before doing so, they, together with Aboud, spent some time fishing in the Gulf. They caught salmon and ironically for Aboud and his fellow fishermen, it was their lucky day yesterday when they caught more than the usual daily catch following the protest.

Aboud told the fishermen that once Petrotrin starts detonating the blasts, the sound would be so loud, it could blow the eardrums of any divers in the ocean.

Aboud said, "We are defending the Gulf of Paria which is the food basket for TT. This is a national mission. They are doing three seismic surveys at the same time — one in south-west Trinidad, north-east Trinidad and the other in north-east Tobago. What is going to happen to the fishery when they bomb three times?"

Aboud said it is his view that the seismic activities amount to a criminal offence and the ruling People's Partnership government should "hang their head in shame" for not considering the livelihood of fisher folks. Yesterday's protesting fishermen included those from Otaheite, San Fernando, Claxton Bay, La Brea and Cedros.



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Fisherman Lincoln Ramroop, 37, of Otaheite, told Newsday that when blasting is conducted, the fish migrate and it takes years before they return. Ramroop said, "We used to fish close to the shore, now we have to go miles out. It never used to be so before. We are not getting the amount of fishes we used to get. The fishes love to come here to lay eggs but when they do their blasting, even the eggs are destroyed."

In a statement yesterday, Petrotrin's Corporate Communication's head, Gillian Friday, confirmed that 14 fishing pirogues surrounded the seismic vessel. The statement said Petrotrin's security officers, the National Coast Guard and the Air Guard, were on site to ensure the situation was managed and controlled. The company's statement added that the 510km² Ocean Bottom Cable Seismic Survey, is being conducted in conformance with all applicable laws and environmental regulations as Petrotrin continues to pursue its mandate to increase reserves and production. It is anticipated that upon the successful completion of the survey, the statement added, it will redound to increased profits for the company and its stakeholders, and ultimately the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

The statement further advised that all vessels and boats must steer clear in order to give the vessels wider berth

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