

WOMEN'S ROLE IN FISHERIES IN BRITTANY, FRANCE

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In France, fisher's wives play an important role within the small and medium scale fishing enterprises. They are usually in charge of the administrative work and many other tasks related to the activity of the enterprises that take place on land. Some of them are involved in marketing activities by selling fish directly to consumers or restaurants. Women's contribution in fisheries has only recently gained some legal recognition, some year later than in other family based businesses like agriculture or trade. In 1998, the French State recognized this role by giving the possibility to fisher's wives to accede to the legal status of "collaborative spouse", thus giving them access to various social benefits, including retirement pensions. Only a few fisher's wives took up this status, which wasn't obligatory until this year. Many preferred to look for a job in other sectors because they considered that fisheries income was uncertain and they preferred to have a fixed income.

This paper presents the results of interviews and a questionnaire survey conducted during spring 2007 in Brittany, the main fishing region on the French Atlantic coast. The first objective was to understand the diversity of women's contributions and estimate the time they spent, taking into account the size of the business or the type of fishing, including its seasonal patterns. The second aim of the analysis was to understand the main factors that determine a fisher's wife decision to take up or not the option of status of collaborative spouse. Is it because they perceive their contribution as a natural extension of their housewifely role; because of their husband's opposition; for economic reasons or any other? As the status became obligatory in June 2007, it is interesting to explore the arguments put forward by women to justify their earlier choice. The research addresses also the question of how women manage the multiplicity of their responsibilities when, besides contributing to the family business or having a job outside, they are also in charge of social and family relations, children and other household work.

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