

"Fisher Safety - there's a long way to go" – Roger Kullberg



Roger Kullberg

Roger Kullberg, 44, left his small island residence in an archipelago outside Gothenburg, Sweden, to join the FAO's Safety at Sea project for small-scale fishing vessels (South Asia) at BOBP-IGO as Fishery Officer in September 2007. The assignment is till December 2008.

Roger studied business administration at the University of Gothenburg, then fisheries management, biology and technology at the same university. He attended several courses on safety at sea, both on his own and through the Swedish Maritime Administration.

Roger has worked in the Bay of Bengal region earlier. Nearly 20 years ago, he did a three-month "Minor Field Study" on bycatch from shrimp trawlers operating in Andhra Pradesh. One recommendation from the study was to reduce bycatch by introducing more selective trawl gear. The study was carried out by BOBP in collaboration with the Swedish Board of Fisheries.

The cheerful, ever-smiling Roger talked to *Bay of Bengal News* about his previous jobs and the present one.

Q: I understand you came to BOBP from the Swedish Maritime Administration. What were your duties there?

A: I was a Vessel Traffic Systems Operator. My work related to port management and vessel traffic management. I supervised logistics and vessel crew, and coordinated pilot vessels and tugboats. Safety-at-sea activities on the west coast of Sweden were also part of my work.

Q: Can you elaborate on your safety-at-sea activities?

A: I worked in close co-operation with the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre. I know about IMO regulations and guidelines such

as SOLAS, MARPOL and STWC, as well as the Code of Safety for Fishermen and Fishing Vessels. I have long experience with both distress communication and regular VHF communication using IMO's standard marine communication phrases.

I have also helped develop our communication systems with fishing vessels and various clients. I'm familiar with vessel construction, design and stability.

When I was a fisherman in November 1995, the vessel I worked on sunk in the Baltic Sea. I was off that week. The crew of four managed to survive in the cold water because of immersion suits – without which they may have died. (Fishers are expected to carry these suits with them, but they are worn only in an emergency.)

At that time, safety courses for fishermen were not mandatory. But they became mandatory – at the urging of women from the fishing communities – after some more accidents occurred.

Equipment by itself doesn't ensure safety. You may have all the equipment in the world, but without awareness and training, you aren't safe.

Q: You have been a teacher as well. Where?

A: I prepared and conducted training, education and awareness programmes on fisheries among students. I also served as a part-time lecturer at a fisheries high school in Öckerö, Sweden. My main topics were fisheries technology, fisheries management and safety at sea.

Q: Please tell us about your experience as a fisherman.

A: Between 1988 and '99, I worked at various places in both industrial and small-scale fisheries – in

Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Latvia, Scotland, Morocco in West Africa. I served as commander, first mate deck hand, engineer and fisherman. I engaged in trawling, purse-seining, longlining, netting, trapping and Danish seining. I worked in the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, the North Atlantic, the Atlantic outside West Africa and in the Bay of Bengal.

Q: What will your duties be in your present job in Chennai?

A: I am settling into my present job in the Bay of Bengal region. I made a field trip to Bangladesh in the second half of January and took part in workshops in Chittagong on safety at sea and on MCS (monitoring, control and surveillance). I visited Kuakata, where I met fishers affected by a severe cyclone in November. I also visited Barisal, Mahipur and Patuakhali. The fishers generally lead a tough life, they don't have either safety equipment or training. A pilot project on safety may be introduced in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh

My duties, in co-operation with the FAO project coordinator and the BOBP-IGO director, will be to develop and improve accident reporting and analysis systems, recommend better distress communication systems, conduct baseline surveys to review the design, construction and status of small fishing vessels in the region, help organize workshops, assist member-countries in improving fisheries management systems.

We need to make the fisherman's working environment safe and comfortable.

There's a long way to go!