

THE PEOPLE BEHIND FISHBASE AND SEALIFEBASE

AQUE ATANACIO: THE ARTIST BEHIND FISHBASE

RACHEL 'AQUE' ATANACIO

joined FishBase in 1995 when the project needed a graphic designer and her other contract at the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management was ending.

Trained directly under the guidance of professional artists, Aque's skills caught the eye of Rainer Froese who was looking for someone to draw the outlines of the families for the Family Table in FishBase.

"Up until now, we are getting requests from many people for permission to use these family outline drawings for their books or presentations," the graphic artist said.

Although she was a pioneer when it comes to remote working, as she was on a contractual basis, Aque was eventually summoned into the FishBase headquarters. Her first on-site task consisted of scanning over 11,000 slides of Caribbean and Indo-Pacific reef fishes provided by [Jack Randall](#) and entering them in the Picturesmain Table.

This work pushed her to communicate with other people contributing fish pictures and to consult taxonomists on fish IDs.



As she went about doing this, she started accumulating the contact information of many of FishBase's collaborators. Soon enough, Aque was tasked with maintaining the Collaborator Table and, later on, the Sponsors and Common Names tables.

Even though she finds all of these tasks very rewarding, there is one contribution she is particularly proud of: The 'Fishing Down the Marine Food Web' illustration that she created for a presentation linked to the homonymous [paper](#) published by Pauly *et al.* in 1998.

"This illustration can now be found on the internet in various styles and versions but all are based on the very first version that I did for Dr. Pauly. I remember he once said to me my name would forever be associated with his because of that illustration ...but the truth is, no one is aware I did it, except for him!" Aque said with a smile.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND FISHBASE AND SEALIFEBASE

In addition to providing illustrations for papers, she enjoys making the 'size at maturity' posters and fish rulers for other FishBase partners and supporters. She also remembers fondly her participation in a video production course where her final piece was a video titled *Please, don't eat the babies*, which was aimed at discouraging catching young fish.

"The audience was intrigued and everyone was in full attention while watching the video. At the closing ceremony, I was surprised to receive a special award for 'best video production.' It felt like winning the Oscar!" Aque said, laughing.

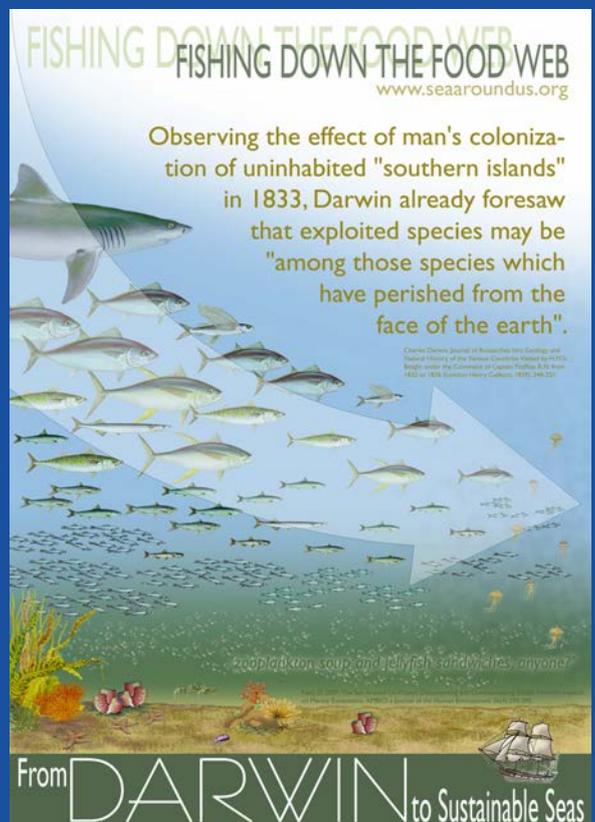
Helping her colleagues and collaborators has always come with a reward. Aque also recalled the time she spent a night on a smelly fishing vessel, doing translations as a BBC filmmaker interviewed local fishers who were supposed to haul a big catch the next day.

"To my surprise, there was not even a single fish caught the entire evening the line was in the water! That was for me witnessing firsthand how real the problem of overfishing is."

For Aque, working at FishBase is never boring and these days she has a big motivation to keep going: "I would still like to continue, even past my retirement age if possible, to help complete the pictures for ALL species in the database," she said.



Aque during her first years working at FishBase.



Fishing down the food webs poster created by Rachel Atanacio for the art exhibit "From Darwin to Sustainable Seas," held in Brussels 11-12 February 2010 and organized by Mundus Maris.