

Entrada Visual- *Visual Submission*
Thirty years since the Merluza Boom of the early 1990s
Treinta Años desde el Boom de la Merluza a inicios de 1990's

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Niños en Isla Casma.

In the mid 1980s families from all over Chile went to the Patagonian archipelago to make their fortunes fishing Merluza (*Merluccius australis*). They moved south because the Chilean government was promoting the export of seafood, prices were high and fish had become scarcer further north. By the early 1990's it was like a gold rush in the Aisen region. A fisherman told me that he came because the islands belonged to no-one, and he could work for himself, not for a boss. He had heard that in two hours you could fill a boat with fish. Artisanal fishermen supplied fish buyers, who supplied the export companies. Women took the painstaking jobs of cleaning and filleting the fish in the processing plants on the mainland. After the boom, people stayed on and colonized the islands. In the 1990s, when industrial boats and factory ships dragged mile-long nets through the inner fjords, the artisanal fishermen rowed out at night and cut the nets. In 2012, when Sernapesca gave precedence to industrial boats over local artisanal fishermen, they barricaded the coastal towns in protest. Now, in 2022, they are largely divided between those who want to fish, and those who sell their seasonal fishing quotas to the export companies. Many of their sons and daughters work for the salmon farms which have now colonized the fjords.



