

### **A delicate balance: The Cabo Blanco and Panic Point (mis)management case, Peru**

Cabo Blanco bay in northern Peru ( $4^{\circ}$  S) is where the cold and productive Humboldt current meets the tropical Equatorial current before drifting towards the westward Pacific. This shifting balance was noted by fishermen that called El Nino (child) to particular warmer events that usually started around Christmas. The increased productivity and diversity arising from the meeting currents has also been noted by keen recreational fishermen that are still trying to break the record for catching the biggest black marlin.

Cabo Blanco is also home of two world-class waves. During winter, the biggest swells from the southern hemisphere wrap around the headland and peel along a couple of hollow sections at Panic Point before closing out against the sandy beach. Further north along the beach, the rocky reef of Cabo Blanco offers the perfect configuration for waves approaching from summer northern swells, resulting in arguable the best barrel in Peru and South America.

In 1993, the local fishermen association built a pier in Cabo Blanco despite the opposition from surfers and other parties (Figure 1). Regardless of the lack of technical reports studying local bathymetry and wave/current dynamics, fishermen argued that the pier would not affect or be affected by waves. The quality of the wave at Cabo Blanco was negatively affected, effectively shortening its length and influencing the delicate sediment balance that modulates the wave intensity. The pier has lasted only half of its projected life span.

A new proposal aims to build a second pier southward of the current one, where the Panic Point wave breaks.

This study presents an overview of the efforts from a group of surfers together with the Peruvian Surfing Association to halt this attempt and protect the waves from further degradation. A study of the local bathymetry and wave dynamics is presented to determine the best location for the pier that would benefit both fishermen and surfers.



*Figure 1: A wave wraps around Cabo Blanco headland (background) and closes out at Panic Point. The Cabo Blanco pier (foreground) trying to resist the impact of a solid swell.*

## **Javier Leon - Bio**

Javier is passionate about the coast. After spending countless hours travelling and surfing along the uplifted and sediment-rich beaches of the Peruvian desert, he decided to study this complex space from a “formal” geographical approach. He completed a BA in Geography and then crossed the Pacific to further specialize in coastal geomorphology in New Zealand. His research has applied geospatial applications, like GIS terrain analysis and remote sensing, to better understand the seafloor dynamics and evolution. He recently completed his PhD thesis in Wollongong, Australia focusing in the geomorphology of coral reefs of the Torres Strait region. He is yet to surf an uncharted left reef somewhere warm and uncrowded.

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