

NEWS RELEASE

International Pressure Grows Against WWF's Shoddy Shrimp Certification Standards

4th May, 2011. Activists from more than 40 organizations around the world released an Open Letter (*document appended*) addressed to the committee members of the WWF-led Aquaculture Dialogues. Recently, at an event at the European Seafood Exposition in Brussels WWF's new certification standards for tilapia, pangasius, abalone and bivalves were ceremonially given to the newly-formed Aquaculture Stewardship Council -- another WWF-led body.

Calling the standards "a crude attempt [...] that perpetuated unsustainable production systems" they dismissed WWF's claim that the standards were developed in consultation with local communities and indigenous peoples who are affected by aquaculture farms. They alleged that WWF's plans to certify the export-oriented, industrial production of such species as shrimp, *pangasius* and salmon were developed specifically to promote the interests of the aquaculture industry. They also pointed out that the standards were being diluted under pressure from the industry to ensure that 20% of existing shrimp producers could be certified immediately after the standards were released.

The "Aquaculture Dialogues" run by WWF were in part funded by the seafood industry¹, and the individual employed by WWF to run the process was previously employed as a regional vice-president for a controversial aquaculture multinational, that has been widely accused of labour violations and environmental destruction.²

"WWF is wrong to claim their standards include inputs from local "stakeholders" when the main body of those stakeholders- the local resource users, who are directly affected by the industry- did not have any voice in determining these 'standards'," says Natasha Ahmad of Asia Solidarity Against Industrial Aquaculture (ASIA).

Riza Damanik of KIARA -- a network of Indonesian fisher-folk groups -- agrees. "We saw the WWF Aquaculture Dialogue in Jakarta and protested at the venue," he said. "99% of those in attendance were from the shrimp industry and the government. WWF's claim that communities were involved is a joke -- they organized their so-called dialogue with affected local communities in a posh city venue."

"These WWF/ ShAD standards are just one more 'pie-in-the-sky' attempt to justify and expand the profits of an unsustainable and destructive industry, resulting in further loss of mangrove forests and displacement of local communities," says Alfredo Quarto, of Mangrove Action Project.

"WWF continues to ignore the risk that their shrimp certification scheme may result in actually increasing demand for shrimp, thus increasing the expansion of the bad practices that certification was supposedly trying to address through these standards," says Gudrun Hubendick of the Stockholm Shrimp Action Group in Sweden.

The Open Letter is signed "The Conscientious Objectors" and the signatories work on an astonishingly diverse spectrum of issues -- human rights, consumer rights, indigenous peoples rights, land and water use, agriculture, environmental law and conservation, labour rights, marine and coastal ecology, soil science, social science and fisheries.

1 Last month WWF announced a partnership with SYSCO, the largest food distributor in the US, to assess the sourcing of its farmed fish species, in return for assistance in funding the Aquaculture dialogues (http://www.fishupdate.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/12365/WWF_partners_with_SYSCO_on_sustainable_seafood.html) 17 April 2009

2 The head of WWF's aquaculture dialogue program is Jose Villalon, who previously managed a 470-acre shrimp farm in Mazatlan in Mexico, and worked for Marine Harvest in Guayaquil, Ecuador as Vice-President of Shrimp Farm Production for 11 years.

The Conscientious Objectors claim that export-oriented, industrial aquaculture has had a devastating impact on all these sectors.

Regional Contacts:

Asia: Natasha Ahmad, Asia Solidarity Against Industrial Aquaculture (ASIA),
E-Mail: secretariat@asiasolidarity.org
Tel: +91-33-22840767

Latin America: Jorge Varela, CODDEFFAGOLF, Honduras
E-Mail: cgolf@coddeffagolf.org

Africa: Edem O Edem, Nigerian representative for the African Mangrove Network
E-Mail: edemgreen@yahoo.com

USA Alfredo Quarto, Mangrove Action Network
E-Mail: mangroveap@olympus.net
Tel: (360) 452-5866

Notes to Editor:

The rapid rise in global demand for cheap shrimp and farmed salmon has caused extensive degradation of mangrove wetlands and other coastal ecosystems and subsequent losses in biodiversity. These losses have also destroyed livelihoods among local communities and indigenous peoples in many nations across the global South.

Shrimp: At a time when shrimp is the most popular seafood in the U.S., and growing in popularity in Europe and Japan, most consumers don't realize the extensive problems their appetite for shrimp engenders. 90% of shrimp consumed in the U.S. are imported from countries where mangrove ecosystems have been recently cleared to establish vast stretches of shrimp ponds dug into once productive wetland soils. This causes serious declines in biodiversity and related wild fisheries, shoreline erosion, increased susceptibility to hurricanes and tsunamis, and releases massive quantities of carbon, which had previously been safely stored beneath mangrove roots, thus contributing to climate change. There are also many health issues raised by eating farmed shrimp grown in chemical soups of antibiotics, pesticides and other contaminants.
For more information: <http://www.mangroveactionproject.org/issues/shrimp-farming/shrimp-farming>.

Salmon: Similar issues pervade the fin-fish aquaculture industries. Salmon farming is one such industry leading to massive escapes of non-native Atlantic salmon into Pacific Ocean waters, while endangering native Pacific salmon and other marine life because of disease and parasite outbreaks, pollution and overuse/misuse of antibiotics potentially causing dangerous pathogens to develop antibiotic resistance.
For more information: http://www.puresalmon.org/fact_sheets.html

Feed: salmon and shrimp are carnivores, and for every kilo of the product on the supermarket shelf, several kilos of wild caught fish and frequently GMO-sourced soya, are used to feed the farmed salmon and shrimp. The sheer amount of food needed to feed shrimp and salmon on an industrial scale is destroying ecosystems and livelihoods on land and at sea in Latin America, where much of these feedstuffs are sourced from. For more information::
http://www.theecologist.org/pages/ecologist_media.asp?podcast_id=105

Certification: Scientific research carried out in Indonesia to assess the effectiveness of certification schemes on farmed shrimp in the region, found a catalogue of systemic problems associated with certification, and concluded that, “...*these systems may never fulfil any of their overarching objectives such as long term sustainability or reduced consumption of non-certified shrimps*”

For more information:

<http://www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/upload/Foreningsdokument/Rapporter/rap-inter-shrimp-naturland.pdf>