

5. The Global Database now has records from more than 500 aggregations and the development of a programme for data input and retrieval through the SCRFA website is almost complete. Information has been collected by literature review, personal communications and by field surveys to collect information, through detailed interviews, in areas from which little has been published. Over 100 interviews have now been completed for the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Palau, and Federated States of Micronesia, and partially completed for the Philippines; and they will shortly be conducted in eastern Malaysia and eastern Indonesia. Summaries of completed field surveys will be posted on the SCRFA website and results to date have revealed at least 50 exploited aggregations, all previously unrecorded. Although aggregation sites are documented in the database, actual locations are not made available in the public domain to avoid the possibility of further exploitation as a result.

We continue to provide support and information and to focus attention on spawning aggregations through activities ranging from technical input into conservation and management initiatives by other NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and fishery departments, to presenting our work in international forums, providing information and preparing educational materials. Most recently, presentations were made in Palau and the Philippines (June and July 2003), at the SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting (August 2003), the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute meeting (November 2003), and to NGOs and fishery departments wherever field surveys have been conducted. In 2004 we will participate in the 4th World Fisheries Congress in Canada, and the 10th International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS) in Japan, among other meetings. We encourage submissions to participate in our aggregation mini-symposium at the 10th ICRS.

If you wish to learn more about SCRFA's work, or if you have particular information needs, please contact us at scrfa@hkucc.hku.hk.



Project update: Developing industry standards for the live reef food fish trade

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Introduction

As described in the previous issue of this Bulletin (Number 11, April 2003, pages 47–52), a project is being undertaken by the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to develop industry standards for the live reef food fish trade (LRFFT). The goal of the project is to bring together stakeholders and build a consensus on what “best practices” are needed to improve the conduct of the industry and enhance industry sustainability, including sustainable reefs, fish stocks, and fishing communities. Support for the project is being provided by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Fisheries Working Group, the United States Department of State, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Packard Foundation.

The standards identify best practices relating to assessment and management of fish stocks, capture and culture methods, transportation and holding and human health and safety issues. The

implementation of the standards is done on a voluntary basis.

It is envisaged that industry operators, governments, marine conservation organisations and other stakeholders will use these standards as a guide to ensure that the LRFFT becomes a sustainable, high-value fishery providing improved livelihoods for local fishers while conserving the reef habitats upon which those fisheries rely. For example, government agencies may use the standards as input in developing rules and regulations governing the LRFFT in their respective countries. Industry operators may benefit from the standards by learning what best practices are in place so that they can improve their operations accordingly.

To ensure credibility, these standards are being developed via an open consultative process that, as much as possible, brings together and engages all relevant stakeholders through the use of advisory groups and standards review workshops in source and market countries. This process not only creates

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a mechanism to compile information on the LRFFT but also provides a medium for various stakeholders to connect with each other. In other words, the standards development process acts as an information clearinghouse for LRFFT best practices.

Standards content and structure

The draft LRFFT standard is divided into three parts:

1. The wild harvest of live reef food fish (i.e. resource assessment and fishery viability, fishery management and planning, fishing operations).
2. Live reef food fish aquaculture.
3. Importing, holding, distribution, and marketing of live reef food fish.

The standards documentation consist of three levels: 1) the standard, 2) the best practice document, and 3) training and implementation manuals (the latter known collectively as “tool kits”). At the first level, the standard consists of bullet-point criteria, called “Requirements.” For example:

Requirement 10 of Part B states: “Destructive methods of fishing are not used within the fishery.”

At the second level, the best practice document expands each of the bullet points of the standard and is intended to describe how a participant in the LRFFT industry may seek to satisfy each criterion. For example:

“... Hook and line gear has been identified as the fishing technique that has the least impact upon coral reef habitats and may, although not always in practice, have the least impact upon bycatch species. The use of destructive fishing techniques such as poisons, explosives, traps and recruitment traps should be prohibited ...”

The third level of documentation consists of a series of “tool kits,” which include training and implementation manuals (e.g. “Training manual: How to catch food fish alive, practical lessons on the hook and line decompression technique”).

As development of the standards progresses, the project team will receive further information from the Standards Advisory Group (see below), industry, government and other relevant organisations, especially at the tool-kit level. Government agencies, for example, may be able to share existing rules and regulations. Industry operators may share their operation manuals on issues such as holding and transportation practices. Fishers may also share various practical techniques on non-

destructive harvest methods. Relevant regional bodies, such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), may share practical techniques on the assessment and management of fish stocks.

Standards development process

During 2003, a Standards Advisory Group (SAG), a group of experts, was formed specifically to review the draft standards and provide comments and inputs into the standards development process. The SAG now consists of 71 individuals representing the industry, government agencies, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations from 16 countries. To ensure wider stakeholder input, standards review workshops have also been conducted in Hong Kong, New Caledonia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia during the second half of 2003.

The first round of SAG review (SAG 1) was originally scheduled to take place in the first half of 2003. The process was delayed due to the outbreak of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and the Iraq war and by the nature of the consultative, multi-stakeholder process, whereby participants need sufficient time to respond to requests to review and comment on the draft standards. The project team has had to strike a balance between making sure that comments from SAG members are received within an agreed timeline and at the same time keeping an open door to valuable late comments that might be received.

Overall, the structure and scope of the standards documentation were received well by the reviewers during SAG 1. Most comments received to date had to do with fine-tuning of the wording of the standards documentation rather than significant changes in intensity or extent of the requirements. Most SAG members were supportive of the iterative review process and expressed an interest in remaining involved in the second round of the SAG review (SAG 2).

From August to November 2003, the standards documentation has been undergoing SAG 2. Figure 1 outlines the standards development process and shows our progress to date.

Running concurrently with the SAG review process, a series of in-country standards review workshops have been conducted in the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, Hong Kong and the Pacific Islands. The workshops are an important outreach activity and essential to the review and comment process to ensure the draft standards and the standards development process are known to stakeholders. The purpose of the workshops is to

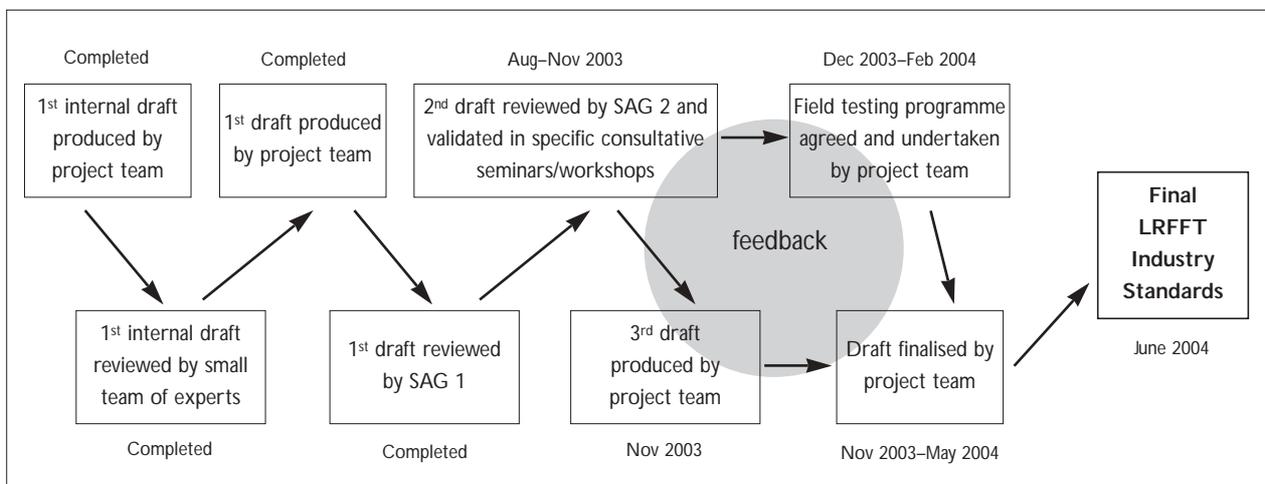


Figure 1. Standards development process for the live reef food fish trade.

encourage broad stakeholder participation and to receive feedback on the standard in terms of the practicability and the capacity of industry and other stakeholders to implement its requirements.

The first standards review workshop was conducted in Hong Kong in April 2003 and attended by representatives of industry, the Hong Kong Chamber of Seafood Merchants (HKCSM), government (Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department — AFCD), and restaurateurs (Federation of Restaurants). A workshop for the Pacific region was conducted as part of the Heads of Fisheries meeting in Noumea, New Caledonia, in August 2003. Fisheries representatives from Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Vanuatu and Kiribati attended the workshop, as well as observers from SPC, FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and the University of the South Pacific.

At the Asia-Pacific meeting of the World Aquaculture Society held in Bangkok in September 2003, an update on the standards project was presented to a special session on grouper aquaculture issues. This was followed by a half-day workshop attended by farmers and representatives of research agencies such as the Network of Aquaculture Centers in Asia Pacific (NACA), the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), industry and government, and which facilitated specific feedback on the aquaculture aspects of the standards.

In October 2003, standards review workshops were conducted in the Philippines and Indonesia. The former was conducted in conjunction with the

launch of the “Cyanide Free Palawan” movement organised by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) and the Philippine exporters association (*Industriya Sa Dagat* — ISDA). The workshop was held in Puerto Princessa and attended by representatives from local and national governments in the Philippines, industry operators and non-governmental organisations.

The Indonesia standards review workshop was co-organised by MAC and the *Forum Kerapu*, an informal group that consists of government officials and industry operators with an interest in grouper aquaculture and trade. The focus of this workshop was to give a general introduction to the standards development project to the Indonesia stakeholders. As a follow up, workshop participants requested that a second workshop be conducted to review standards in more detail in January 2004.

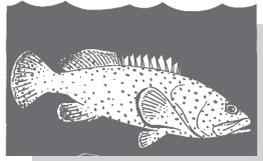
During these in-country standards review workshops, the project team conducts a standards validation exercise to verify the applicability and robustness of the standards. For each of the requirements for which tool kits are developed, the validation exercise involves assessing the capability of source countries to undertake assessment and monitoring activities and to implement the requirement. Results of this analysis will feed into the standards development process to produce realistic and achievable best practice standards.

Conclusion

As the standards development process moves forward, attention is increasingly being given to the issue of standards implementation, especially the capacity to implement the standards. Discussions thus far have revealed that while some countries

have formulated and implemented a fishery viability assessment process, the process needs strengthening, as it is not a rubber stamping exercise. This is of particular importance where there are currently no LRFFT operations but where baseline assessments show there is insufficient stock to support the trade. In those cases, mechanisms must be put in place to discourage commencement of LRFFT activities.

Overall, the standards development process has enjoyed a positive response from all relevant stakeholders. This is evidenced by the fact that all the standards review workshops have been co-hosted by local organisations, signifying buy-in to the standards development process. Support has been further demonstrated by the high level of workshop attendance and the valuable input the workshops have been able to generate.



News and events

live reef fish

Marine Ornamentals '04 and Aquaculture 2004

Marine Ornamentals '04, the 3rd International Conference for the Marine Ornamental Community, will meet on 1–4 March 2004, in Honolulu, Hawaii, concurrently with Aquaculture 2004, the triennial meeting of the World Aquaculture Society. Marine Ornamentals '04 has the stated goal of creating an economically and environmentally viable future for the dynamic marine ornamentals industry and its diverse clientele by:

- improving the methods for the collection, distribution, and management of wild marine ornamental species;
- increasing the variety, quantity and availability of cultured marine ornamental species; and
- encouraging education and outreach activities in the husbandry and conservation of marine ornamental species.

In addition to presentations and posters on the above topics, Marine Ornamentals '04 will feature a Trade Show that will be part of the larger Aquaculture 2004 Trade Show and Exposition.

A special session of Aquaculture 2004, "Economics, Socio-economics and Markets of Marine Finfish Culture," will be sponsored by the International Association of Aquaculture Economics Management (IAAEM) and the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA).

For more information on Marine Ornamentals '04, go to the website <http://www.hawaii-aquaculture.org/marineornamentals04.html>. For more information on Aquaculture 2004, go to <http://www.was.org/meetings/Hawaii/Pages/Hawaii2004.asp>.

Study programme on marine finfish aquaculture and markets 2004, Guangzhou and Hong Kong, China

Source: *Marine Finfish Aquaculture Newsletter*, No. 6, July-September, 2003

The study programme is intended to provide participants with an insight into the live marine fish markets and aquaculture in southern China and Hong Kong. The study programme will be organised by NACA [Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific] in cooperation with the Guangdong Dayawan Fishery Development Center (Department of Marine & Aquatic Products, China), Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries, Guangdong Fisheries Society, and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) - Hong Kong SAR. Tentative schedule will be around July 2004 period. More information on this study programme will be provided on the marine fish network website when available. Interested parties can contact Mr Sih-Yang Sim (grouper@enaca.org) to register their interest.

Note from the editor: *Marine Finfish Aquaculture Newsletter* is a newsletter of the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA). The newsletter is devoted to grouper and coral reef fish aquaculture research, development and commercial farming. It is available at <http://www.enaca.org/grouper/>