



NOAA/USAID-Coral Triangle Initiative partnership in the live reef food fish project

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The Coral Triangle region in Southeast Asia includes about 6 million km² of nearshore waters and reefs. The Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) was launched in December 2007 as a multilateral partnership of six countries (CT6): Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste (or East Timor), to help conserve coral reefs and food security in the region. In May 2009, a CTI Regional Action Plan was endorsed by the six heads of State at a CTI Summit.

The live reef food fish trade (LRFFT), from harvesting to export, occurs primarily in the CTI region, with retail markets mainly in Hong Kong and other major urban centres in China. The trade began in the mid-1970s and spread first through Southeast Asia, then into the Indo-West Pacific. The LRFFT is a multi-million dollar trade in the Asia-Pacific area with a total estimated retail value of USD 810

million in 2002.² Major concerns with the industry include: 1) life-history characteristics of target fish that make them vulnerable to fishing; 2) depletion of fish stocks, especially predators, and reduction of food available to coastal residents; 3) increasing demand for and scarcity of reef fish; 4) destabilization of the coral reef ecosystem (e.g. loss of top predator control); and 5) reduction of biodiversity, which helps maintain resilience and integrity of the reef ecosystem.

The US Coral Triangle Initiative (US-CTI) Support Program was officially launched in February 2010, with finalization of a consolidated work plan. This five-year program is being implemented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and a consortium of non-governmental organizations



The Coral Triangle region in Southeast Asia (map produced by Charles Huang, Conservation Science Program, WWF-US through the Coral Triangle Support Partnership).

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² Sadovy J.Y., Donaldson T.J., Graham T.R., McGilvray F., Muldoon G.J., Philips M.J., Rimmer M.A., Smith A. and Yeeting B. 2003. While stocks last: The live reef food fish trade. Manila: Asia Development Bank. 147 p.

(NGOs) (e.g. World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International), under the Coral Triangle Support Partnership (CTSP). To address the concerns, ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) is proposed as a major CTI regional goal. EBFM aims to conserve and sustainably manage target species and maintain a balanced and productive ecosystem by reducing impacts on non-target species (bycatch), habitats, ecosystem functions, and other environmental relationships, including the use of adaptive management approaches. The LRFFT is a main component of the major US-CTI project on EBFM. Other major US-CTI projects include enforcement and/or mitigation of IUU fishing, marine protected areas (MPAs), and assessing the impacts of climate change.

The NOAA/USAID-CTI partnership, a component of the US-CTI Support Program, includes leaders and local fishery agency staff from CT6 nations, NGOs, and a support team of technical experts from NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, University of Hong Kong, WorldFish Center, and Australian institutions. The NOAA/USAID-CTI program will implement regional exchange activities to achieve effective management and sustainable trade in live reef fish through a five-step approach: 1) regional partnership building; 2) collaboration and technical assistance (e.g. government-to-government support and technical assistance); 3) scientific and management/policy advice; 4) training and capacity building; and 5) assistance with alternative approaches (e.g. expand full-cycle mariculture of LRFF species, such as groupers). NOAA's target audience for capacity building is the CT6 governments, while CTSP works with local people and NGOs. Results accomplished to date include development of regional work plans for training in EBFM, proposing priority projects for specific sites, and assistance with preparing CT6 nations for international meetings. Activities planned for the coming year include a Regional Exchange Workshop, to be held in Sabah, Malaysia in late 2010, where CT6 nations will develop a collaborative work program and a common position paper, participation at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation fisheries workshop, and initiation of a CTI-LRFFT roundtable.



Live reef fish, mostly grouper, ready for order and consumption in a tank at a Hong Kong restaurant (photo by Stanley Shea).



The humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*), a prized live reef food fish (photo by Robert Schroeder).

While this NOAA/USAID-CTI partnership is expected to enhance fishery biology and management in an ecosystem context, locally supported and effective enforcement of necessary regulations remains critical to the success of improving the sustainability and equitable economics of the LRFFT in the Coral Triangle region.

