

# Towards the Sustainability of Southeast Asian Fisheries: the role of SEAFDEC during the past 50 years and beyond

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This article is based on the Keynote Address delivered by the Author during the Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of SEAFDEC at Dusit Thani Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand on 15 November 2017, which recounts the developmental efforts of SEAFDEC during its first 50 years and provides suggestions for the enhancement of SEAFDEC's tasks in the years to come. The Author started the Keynote Address by paying tribute to two regional projects that have had profound impact on the accelerated development and rational utilization of fishery resources and on the thinking of fisheries administrators of Southeast Asia. These are the FAO/UNDP South China Sea Fisheries Development and Coordinating Programme from 1973 to 1984 and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center from 1967 to the present.

## Introduction

The development of the proposal for Phase I of the South China Sea Fisheries Development and Coordinating Programme as a regional project for possible support from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), was based on the recommendation of the late *Dr. John C. Marr* of the United States, who was then the Program Manager of the FAO/UNDP Indian Ocean Program. Dr. Marr was well known to the Southeast Asian fisheries administrators because of his remarkable knowledge about the fishery resources and the fisheries management needs of the Southeast Asian countries. Based on the said proposal, the Project was subsequently supported by the UNDP and remained in operation until 1984, yielding significant contributions to the acceleration of fisheries development of Southeast Asia with technical inputs estimated by the post project evaluation mission, to be more than 200 million US dollars. The South China Sea Fisheries Development and Coordinating Programme also served for many years during its life span, as the technical arm of the Indo-Pacific Fishery Commission (IPFC).

As for SEAFDEC, the proposal for the establishment of a training center for fishermen with possible support from the Government of Japan, submitted during the First Ministerial Conference for Economic Development of Southeast Asia in Tokyo in April 1966, was developed through the efforts of the late *Dr. Prida Karnasut*, the Director-General for Fisheries of Thailand at that time. During the said Conference, the delegates expressed interest in having such a training center, while the Government of Japan had agreed in principle

to support a regional fisheries center for the promotion of fisheries development in Southeast Asia.

As a consequence, two sessions of a working party which included the Author as one of the members, were convened to formulate an Agreement establishing the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), which was approved during the Inaugural Session of the Council of SEAFDEC in Bangkok in 1968. Moreover, there are other bodies and arrangements that play crucial role in the accelerated development and management of fisheries in Southeast Asia. These include the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Indo-Pacific Fishery Commission (IPFC), Intergovernmental Organization for Marketing Information and Technical Advisory Services for Fishery Products in the Asian and Pacific Region (INFOFISH), Mekong River Commission; Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia and the Pacific (NACA), and the WorldFish Center. SEAFDEC has been collaborating with these organizations and arrangements to foster good governance in the rational utilization of fishery resources in Southeast Asia.



Former SEAFDEC Secretary-General *Dr. Deb Menasveta* delivering the Keynote Address during the Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of SEAFDEC on 15 November 2017

## Evolution of SEAFDEC with the Dynamic Changes in World Fisheries

Hunger was the main issue after World War II. This was the major reason for the establishment of the Food and Agriculture

Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in 1945, with the main objective of eliminating world hunger and malnutrition. Recognizing the valuable contribution of protein food from the world oceans and freshwater sources, FAO established the Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council (now Indo-Pacific Fishery Commission) under Article 14 of its constitution in 1948 to help increase the food supply from the oceans. This was the first regional fishery body of FAO which contributed to the modernization and growth of the fishing industry and fisheries development of Southeast Asia. Two decades later, many countries together with the Southeast Asian countries still anticipated that more fishery resources especially off their coastal waters could be exploited to feed their expanding populations.

The evolution of SEAFDEC from its humble beginnings in 1967 with the primary concern of fish production increase was definitely in consonance with the world thinking. Since then SEAFDEC also known as the Center, has evolved along with the changes which have taken place in world fisheries. When it was established, the Center had two technical departments, viz., the Training Department (TD) hosted by the Government of Thailand and the Marine Fisheries Research Department (MFRD) hosted by the Government of Singapore. In response to the Center's broad mandate of promoting fisheries development for Southeast Asia, the main concern of these two technical departments was to modernize the fishing industry of the Member Countries by training master fishermen and

marine engineers to man commercial or semi-commercial fishing enterprises, and to locate unexploited fishing grounds in our large Sunda Shelf and its contiguous waters. In 1973 the Government of the Republic of the Philippines agreed to host the Aquaculture Department within the established mandate of the Center with the aim of increasing production of fish from aquaculture.

In the second half of the seventies, an international management study group headed by *Mr. Roy Jackson*, then the Assistant Director-General of FAO in charge of fisheries assisted SEAFDEC in appraising its structure and functions as well as its Financial and Administrative Regulations with a view to strengthening them. Funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the study group not only made a series of recommendations, notably, the revision of the said Regulations, but also raised questions about the future of SEAFDEC. Their view was that the South China Sea Fisheries Development and Coordinating Programme had been doing well in assisting the Southeast Asian countries in the development and management of their fishery resources. Furthermore, the International Center for Living Aquatic Resource Management (ICLARM), now referred to as the WorldFish Center, would soon be established under the umbrella of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) which could render assistance to the Southeast Asian countries to develop and manage their fishery resources. However, the SEAFDEC Council of Directors during its Twelfth Meeting in 1979 was resolute and unanimously agreed that SEAFDEC had to continue to function.

In 1974, with the unavailability of the M.V. CHANGI, MFRD was tasked to take up post-harvest technology development while their works on the survey of fishing grounds transferred to TD. With this change of the situation, the Center commenced to broaden its scope of work to include the compilation and establishment of the regional fishery statistical and information systems to ascertain the state of the stocks of fish being exploited.



Sunda Shelf is a southeast extension of the continental shelf of Southeast Asia, where the major landmasses include the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo, Java, Madura, Bali and their surrounding smaller islands. The Shelf covers an area of approximately 1.85 million km<sup>2</sup>. The sea depths over the Shelf rarely exceed 50 meters and extensive areas are less than 20 meters resulting in strong bottom friction and strong tidal friction. Steep undersea gradients separate the Sunda Shelf from the Philippines, Sulawesi, and the Lesser Sunda Islands.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunda\\_Shelf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunda_Shelf)



The M.V. CHANGI granted by the Government of Japan to MFRD in 1969 was decommissioned in 1974



Fisheries post-harvest technologies developed by MFRD are transferred to the Southeast Asian countries through human resource development

In 1981, SEAFDEC sought funding support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, for the setting up of a fishery information and database. Meanwhile, shorter fishery training courses were arranged with the additional financial support from the Government of the Netherlands. Arrangements were also made with the FAO/UNDP South China Sea Fisheries Development and Coordinating Programme to jointly organize a training course on fishery stock assessment in 1982. The Center also collaborated with its Member Governments and FAO, through sessions of working parties to build up a statistical data base. As a result, the first issue of the Fishery Statistical Bulletin for the South China Sea Area of 1976 was published in 1978.

In the eighties, a significant change in world fisheries took place when the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) enabled coastal and archipelagic states to acquire rights and opportunities to develop and manage the fishery resources in their respective exclusive economic zones up to 200 miles from the base line. With the accelerated development of world fisheries during this period, it was generally agreed that more than 70 percent of marine fishery resources of the world had been fully exploited. FAO took the initiative in the implementation of the UNCLOS by organizing a World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development in June-July 1984. The Conference had drawn up a set of strategies and programs of action to assist the world community in the conservation and rational utilization of fishery resources.

In the beginning of the eighties, good progress was made with the setting up of the Center's information services and systems with the funds provided by IDRC. The small-scale fishing and fish farming stakeholders from the region have benefited by receiving information handbooks on fishing and fish farming transcribed into the local languages of the Southeast Asian region. Progress was also made on the setting up of national

and regional bibliographies on fisheries and aquaculture by this project. However, at the end of the IDRC assistance in 1989, the information-related works of the Center had been scaled down because of the lack of funding support.

SEAFDEC through its technical departments gradually modified the long-term training courses to shorter ones. For example, the two-year training for master fishermen and marine engineers to man semi-commercial or commercial fishing vessels, was transformed into shorter courses to be able to train more small-scale fishermen, also with financial support from the Government of the Netherlands. Likewise, knowledge of simple aquaculture techniques has been provided to small-scale fish farmers.

In the field of post-harvest technology development, training courses were organized to familiarize the stakeholders with the Codex Alimentarius and other regulations pertaining to the enhancement of the quality and safety of fishery products both for domestic consumption and export. In 1990, the SEAFDEC Marine Fishery Resources Development and Management Department (MFRDMD) was established and hosted by the Government of Malaysia. Thus, the scope of work of the Center had become broader.

In 1992, the United Nations convened the Conference on Sustainable Development or Earth Summit 1992, which provided inter alia under its Agenda 21 a conceptual framework for the world community to plan and implement policies and strategies for the rational use and development of living resources in the oceans, seas and coastal waters. A follow up convention was convened in 2012, the Earth Summit 2012. As an outcome of the 1992 Earth Summit and in the implementation of the 1982 UNCLOS, a number of initiatives and legal instruments for the sustainable development of the fishery resources were created. Among others, were the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement of 1995; FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries 1995; FAO International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing; and the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

SEAFDEC has responded quickly to the policies and strategies set forth by the world community to enhance good fishery governance and responsible utilization of fishery resources. It has successfully developed a series of Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries in Southeast Asia for the effective implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in the region. It has also facilitated the better understanding of the implications of the global plans of action and instruments planned to be implemented in the region.

In 2001, the Center, in collaboration with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other international and regional fishery organizations, successfully organized

the Millennium Conference: “Fish for the People”. Arising from this Conference was a special five-year program to achieve sustainable fisheries for food security in the region. Subsequently, a follow-up ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference “Fish for the People 2020”: Adaptation to a Changing Environment was convened in 2011. It also produced a set of guidelines for the next decade to achieve fisheries sustainability for food security and the improvement of the livelihood in the region.

In addition to Japan and with all ten Southeast Asian nations as members of SEAFDEC since 2003, the Center has become a full-fledged and internationally recognized intergovernmental institution responsible for sustainable fisheries development. Its mandate, as recommended by the Third SEAFDEC Management Review Committee, is “to promote concerted efforts among the Member Countries to ensure the sustainable contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to the economies, social well-being and food security of the countries of Southeast Asia”.



The Third SEAFDEC Management Review Committee Members (2012-2013)

With all Member States of the ASEAN as members of SEAFDEC, the relationship between ASEAN and SEAFDEC has been fostered, and was formalized with the signing of the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Strategic Partnership in 2007. Through such arrangements, SEAFDEC has been recognized as the technical arm for the implementation of fisheries projects for the ASEAN.

The latest part of the historical events of SEAFDEC during the past ten decades was the establishment in 2014 of the SEAFDEC Inland Fishery Resources Development and Management Department hosted by the Government of Indonesia, to work on the sustainable development of inland capture fisheries. With this recent development, all the Technical Departments of SEAFDEC truly serve the original objective of the Center, which was to respond to the needs and eliminate hunger and malnutrition in the Southeast Asian region.

## The Future of SEAFDEC

The ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security in the New Millennium in 2001 and the follow-up ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference held in 2011 with emphasis on the adaptation to a changing environment have set good guidelines for the future work of the Center in the twenty-first century. However, there are still issues that need further consideration.

These could include:

1. The sustainable development and management of small-scale fisheries in the Member Countries of SEAFDEC with in-depth consideration of coastal area management and the use of an ecosystem approach in the management of fishery resources
2. Issues relevant to the trans-boundary fish stocks or shared stocks on the Sunda Shelf, with a view to launching cooperative study programs and formulating appropriate management measures to effect their sustainable production, with special reference to Article 63 of the Law of the Sea of the United Nations
3. Establishment on a permanent basis of a centralized and efficient regional database for fisheries information and reliable fishery statistics for use in the planning and implementation of programs and projects for the sustainable development and rational utilization of fishery resources of the member countries
4. Strengthening of the human resource capacity of the Member Countries to enable them to achieve the long-term goal of good governance and sustainable fisheries development.

## Ingredients Necessary to Support the Efficient Operation of SEAFDEC

It is clear that SEAFDEC in the Twenty-first Century will have a much broader scope of work than in the mid-seventies. Its work will cover not only technical but also economic, social and legal aspects. The efficient running of the Center will, therefore, depend on a number of ingredients. The following suggestions are therefore raised without necessarily interfering with the good judgment of the SEAFDEC Council of Directors.

1. **Sense of ownership of the Center.** Member Countries should recognize that each is an owner of the Center and has every right and privilege to obtain benefits from being a member. Therefore, to ensure the efficiency of the Center, adequate investment or support both in cash and in kind, should be provided, as the Center will have expanding programs of activity envisaged both in the medium and long-term.
2. **Core staff for implementation of the approved programs.** The staff including its manager should be honest and able. In particular, the leader himself should



A "Toast to the Future of SEAFDEC" offered by the Guest of Honor during the Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of SEAFDEC, H.E. Air Chief Marshal Dr. Prajin Juntong, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand

have the ability to ensure the smooth running of the organization with good results. A number of research and educational institutions, programs and projects run by private or government entities as well as regional and international organizations are usually efficiently run by able and experienced leaders as well as devoted and competent staff. Some organizations have more funds than others because the managers are amicable and talk convincingly, *i.e.* they are not only diplomatic but very persistent and persuasive. Large organizations can run smoothly because the managers have the ability to create and foster mutual respect among the workers. Successful managers also have a sense of anticipation, based on their accumulated experiences to effect cost savings of

the organizations. Therefore, it would be advantageous for the Center to periodically appraise its manpower requirements, like every five or 10 years because it may need more staff to cover not only technical but administrative and legal issues for its expanding programs of activity. Some staff may have to be retrained to perform different tasks as required.

## Conclusion

With the strong support from the Member Countries and concerted action between the SEAFDEC Secretariat and the Technical Departments, there is no question why SEAFDEC will not move into the Twenty-first Century and beyond with much confidence and pride.

## About the Author

Dr. Deb Menasveta was the Third Secretary-General of SEAFDEC serving from January 1976 to January 1981, and served as the Chair of the Third Review Committee of SEAFDEC in 2012-2013. During the delivery of his Keynote Address, *Dr. Deb* was thankful for the opportunity to be able to participate in and celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of SEAFDEC hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand. He also thanked the Director-General of the Fisheries Department of Thailand *Dr. Adisorn Promthep* and the Secretary-General of SEAFDEC *Dr. Kom Silapajarn* for kindly inviting him and giving him the honor to deliver the Keynote Address during the Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of SEAFDEC. This is considering that he had the privilege to witness the birth of the Center in 1967 until it became a full-fledged and internationally recognized institution responsible for sustainable Southeast Asian fisheries development.