

SPECIAL REPORT

Addressing Commercially-exploited Aquatic Species in the Southeast Asian Region

By SEAFDEC Secretariat



Driven by the world's population growth and increased global demand for fishery products, fishing pressure has been rapidly rising while fisheries resources particularly major marine fish stocks or species groups are declining over the past years. Even though the international community has launched various international and regional conservation initiatives with the aim of improving the conservation status of commercially-exploited aquatic species, with particular focus on depleted and overexploited species, such initiatives focus on management measures by regional fishery bodies and arrangements (RFBAs), international treaties; and soft law, e.g. FAO/CCRF. As one of the international environmental legislation, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. CITES works by making international trade in selected animal and plant species conditional through certain controls. All import, export, re-export and introduction from the sea of species covered by the Convention must be authorized through a licensing system.

The conservation and fisheries management efforts of the SEAFDEC Member Countries have been focused on selected commercially-exploited aquatic species such as sharks, tunas, sea cucumber, seahorses etc. However, many countries are still facing key technical issues that include:

- 1) Difficulty in species identification of exported products (e.g. tuna meat, juvenile tunas, shark fins);
- 2) Some species listed under CITES Appendices are caught as incidental catch from trawl fisheries due to the multi-species nature of fisheries in Southeast Asia where large number of small-scale fishers are involved in fishing operations;
- 3) National statistics framework does not seem to facilitate data collection by species resulting in lack of data/information for management purposes; and
- 4) Weak enforcement of national legislations that regulate management and trade of the concerned species.

In order to support the countries in making decision on proper management of commercially-exploited aquatic species and/or endangered species listed in the CITES Appendices, key recommendations for future actions and collaboration were developed during the Regional Technical Consultation (RTC) on Addressing Technical Issues Related to Selected Commercially-exploited Aquatic Species on 18-20 October 2011, Bangkok, Thailand. The recommendations are summarized for immediate-, medium- and long-term actions by Member Countries (**Table 1**).

In addition, the Member Countries also identified HRD requirements such as species identification, biological data collection, use of fishing logbook or catch documentation schemes and on Non-detriment Findings (NDF) to facilitate the implementation of the NDF.

Table 1. Recommendations for immediate-, medium- and long-term actions by the Member Countries

Key Issues	Recommendations/Actions	I	M	L
Insufficient scientific data on status and trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify critically important commercially-exploited aquatic species Harmonize and improve national statistics systems and capacity for collection of statistics Conduct periodic biological data collection Develop national database for long term assessment and prediction of fisheries trends Identify and define the origin of catch by species 	X	X	X
Inadequate stock/catch assessment studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the conduct national stock/catch assessment for selected target species (such as tuna, identified sharks) Establish the Regional Working Group on Stock Assessment (<i>e.g.</i> tuna, identified sharks) Implement Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries 	X	X	X
Fragile coordinating mechanism between fisheries and other agencies involved in CITES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the gap of communication/coordination Clarify the list of focal points of both agencies Enhance coordination Enhance the roles/functions of fisheries authorities in the CITES venues 	X	X	X
Lack of representatives from fisheries sector in CITES discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the participation of countries' fisheries authorities in CITES-related meetings 	X	X	X
Technical problems within CITES system itself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that scientific evidences such as biomass level for MSY are adequately evaluated in proposals for listing of species the Appendices Evaluate the application of look-alike provisions in the CITES regulations Assess the interpretation of criteria for inclusion of species in CITES Appendices 		X	X
Adverse impacts of CITES listings to regional/local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the impacts of the proposed listings and share the results among countries concerned Develop and improve data collection and analysis systems to ensure appropriate implementation of CITES Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) 		X	X
Insufficient policies and measures on conservation/management of concerned species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the appropriate fisheries management measures based on the results of stock assessment Enhance national policies and legal framework to support the enforcement and implementation of the various measures 		X	X
Inadequate mechanism for sharing of information and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share experiences on successful aquaculture and stock enhancement technologies Promote the conservation of ecologically and biologically significant areas (EBSA) 		X	X

Note: I = Immediate-term action
M = Medium-term action
L = Long-term action

In conclusion, the RTC pointed out that several RFMOs and relevant national agencies are also pursuing efforts to ensure sustainable exploitation of aquatic species by regulating trade as well as the sustainable utilization of resources including the collection of data and information through their respective statistical frameworks. In this regard, regional cooperation through the existing mechanisms should be strengthened to

facilitate the exchange of information and avoid duplication of efforts. Meanwhile, the participation of fisheries-related authorities in CITES-related meetings and discussions should be enhanced to reinforce the arguments of the countries in the region and augment relevant technical information on the commercially-exploited aquatic species.

