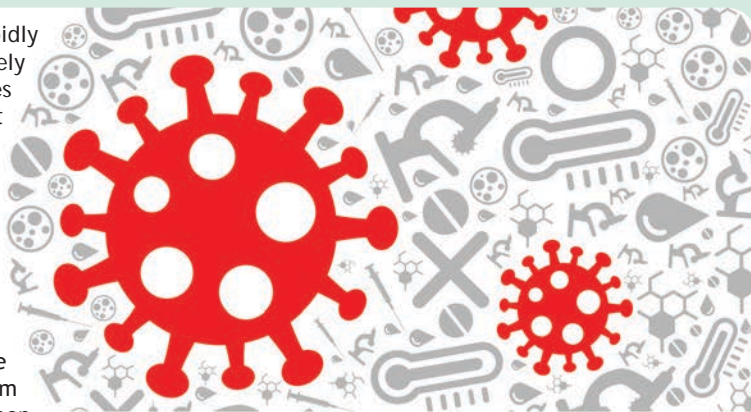


SPECIAL REPORT

Assessing the Impacts of the COVID-19 on Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia by SEAFDEC Secretariat

The Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has rapidly spread throughout the globe since early 2020 impacting severely not only on the lives of people but also on the economies of the countries around the world. It has also brought unprecedented challenges to all development sectors, as business worldwide has been practically shut down because of countries' lockdown measures, disruptions in all modes of transportation, and tourism restrictions affecting the foodservices systems, especially fisheries. Specifically, the crisis has brought severe impacts on the fisheries sector of the Southeast Asian countries as the major producers of fish and fishery products and major suppliers of fish to the global market. Fishing operations encounter difficulties due to national lockdown measures that prohibit the fishers from going out to sea to fish. Meanwhile, fish farmers have been

restricted from working outside of their homes to halt any further spread of the virus. In order to assess the severity of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fisheries and aquaculture in Southeast Asia, the SEAFDEC Secretariat has planned to organize the Webinar on the "Impacts of COVID-19 on Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia" on 2-3 July 2020 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the main objectives of discussing and assessing the impacts, and sharing how the private sector make immediate responses to address the issues as well as the medium-term mitigation of the impacts established by some countries.



General Perspectives

Countries around the world have undertaken various national measures to curb any further transmission of COVID-19 (e.g. social distancing, lockdowns, curfew, temporary closure of businesses, various modes of quarantine). The fisheries industry is most affected as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts the whole food supply chain, impacting on international and national fisheries trade. Recently, FAO published several policy recommendations aimed at assisting

the fisheries sector [^{1,2}] cope with the impacts of COVID-19 at global and regional levels. Nonetheless, the Southeast Asian countries bear the brunt of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially capture fisheries because of the reduced demand for fish and fishery products from hotel, retail and catering (HORECA) services, restricted movements of people, closure of fishing ports, and strict regulations on human biosecurity and fishing vessel supplies. Aquaculture on the other hand, suffer from the restrictions on people's movement and dwindling demand for fish that led to postponement of harvesting the cultured stocks, resulting in high maintenance costs for keeping the stocks. In general, the seafood supply chain is disarrayed due to transport restrictions and shortage of workers not only in fish production but also in processing.

¹ FAO. 2020. The effect of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture in Asia. Retrieved 8th July 2020 [<http://www.fao.org/3/ca9545en/CA9545EN.pdf>]

² FAO. 2020. Measures for supporting wholesale food markets during COVID-19. Retrieved 8th July 2020 [<http://www.fao.org/3/ca9552en/CA9552EN.pdf>]



During the time of the pandemic, the countries continue to implement precautionary approaches for the sustainable management of the fishery resources, following the international fisheries-related policies and instruments with respect to fisheries resources management, such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), Catch Documentation Schemes (CDS). The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to reach the targets (SDG14, SDG 5, etc.) is maintained even considering that the target set in 2020 would be hampered.

National measures such as curfew could increase the incidence of IUU fishing as surveillance is limited because of reduced number of personnel. Therefore, the countries are adjusting their respective national MCS systems through the use of on-line communications and electronic systems. To monitor the status of the fish stocks, remote sensing technology in stock assessment had been adopted, the results of which is used to control production. In Thailand for example, although national measures such as lockdown and curfew

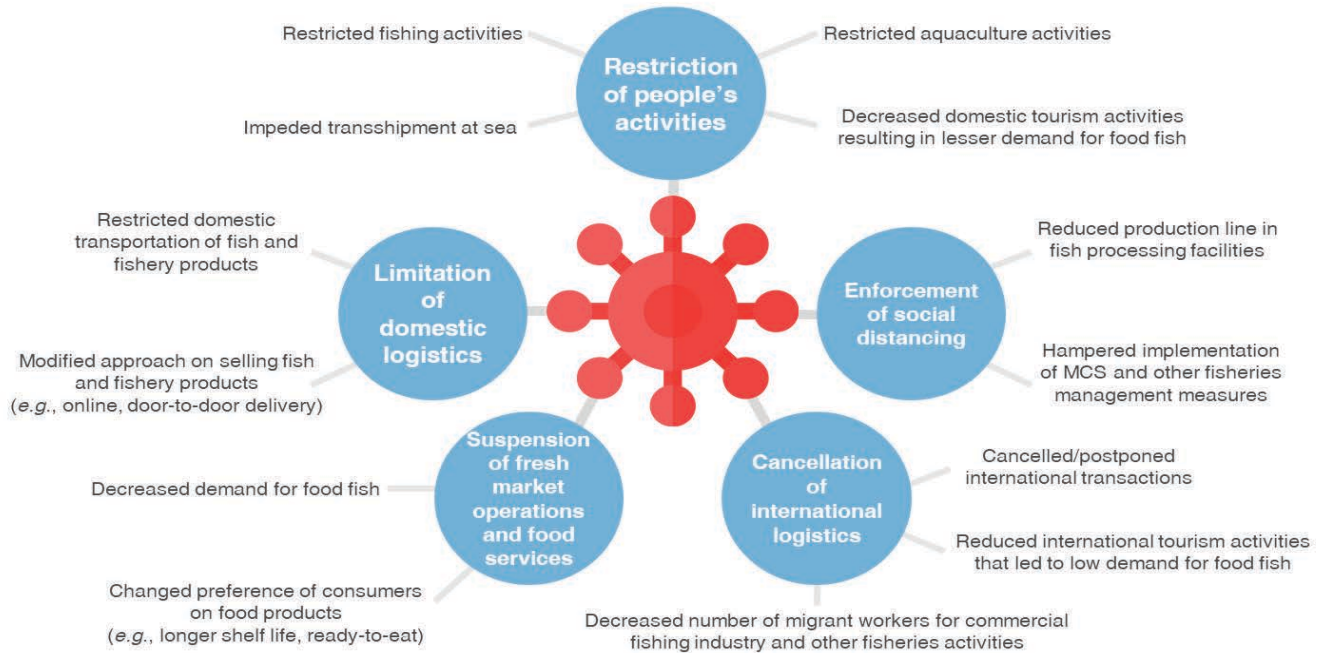
are being imposed, fishing operations at sea during the night had been allowed following certain restrictions. Through the Department of Fisheries, operations of fishing vessels are monitored by the responsible units, *i.e.* Fisheries Monitoring Center (FMC), Port-in Port-Out (PIPO), and Port State Measures (PSM) implementation, using electronic systems and on-line communication. The procedures for controlling IUU fishing have been carried out as before the lockdown but following social distancing. The assigned officers monitor from the equipment on land and report using the applications notwithstanding the reduced number and restricted movements of personnel. Thailand has also developed the national mitigation plans for the fisheries sector that include the extension of seaman's book of foreign crew of fishing vessels until 31 December 2020.

Addressing the Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Fish Trade, Marketing, and Food Security

On the safety of fish and fishery products, there has been no evidence to associate seafood with the spread of COVID-19 or to insinuate that COVID-19 could contaminate

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Possible Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Southeast Asian Region



Box 1. Roles of stakeholders in addressing the impacts of COVID-19

Stakeholders	Anticipated actions to address the impacts of COVID-19
Governments, development organizations and donors	Develop relief packages that support local organizations in their efforts to enhance social and economic resilience; protect local and migrant workers from COVID-19 contamination in workplaces; encourage purchase of seafood for institutional use such as hospitals, and schools; promote domestic and online sales of seafood products
NGOs and civil societies	Facilitate and coordinate activities to support coastal communities and monitor the impacts of COVID-19 at the local level
Private sector	Ensure the health and safety of workers including fishers and fish farmers by endorsing the healthy and safety COVID-19-free procedures along the supply chain
Researchers and the academe	Identify short-term solutions on the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and long-term strategies for effective and appropriate policy development
Fisher and fish farmer communities	Enhance their networks for acquiring relevant information, e.g. supply and demand, to improve their access to markets especially domestic, online and direct sales, and also explore the possibility of seeking assistance from governments and relevant agencies for the establishment of insurance scheme or other means to secure their livelihoods should disasters like this current pandemic occur in the future

fresh fish, thus, it is important to develop through advocacy, the trust of consumers that seafood is safe from COVID-19 infection. Nevertheless, the impacts of COVID-19 on trade and marketing of fish and fishery products, focusing on the experience of Thailand in its tuna industry, surimi and surimi-based products, fresh seafood from small-scale fisheries, frozen seafood, and the pangasius industry of Viet Nam, would also be assessed during the Webinar. It is expected that the ways and means of addressing the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the market and trade of fish and fish products could be established during the webinar.

Ways Forward

All concerned stakeholders are encouraged to play their respective roles in controlling the transmission of COVID-19 at national level, and to ensure that the impacts of the virus are addressed in the most sustainable way (**Box 1**). So that when the market will hopefully be restored in the coming few months and food services systems resume operations, fish trade could speed up and prices could stabilize as the demand for fish heightens. Then, the seafood business would attain speedy recovery and the region's fisheries industry would survive.

