

# Eco-labelling aquatic products:

*Niklas Wennberg and Martin Bjerner*

*Can consumer power  
Asian fisheries more s*

**In** 2001, at the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security in the New Millennium: 'Fish for the People', senior officials of ASEAN-SEAFDEC member countries agreed upon a Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region which included the statement that the ASEAN countries should "anticipate and address the potential impacts of eco-labelling of ASEAN fish and fishery products".





*make the management of Southeast sustainable?*



At the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2005, eco-labelling was one of the main items on the agenda. It was subsequently discussed regionally in April 2005, at the Seventh Meeting of the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Fisheries Consultative Group and the Thirty-Seventh Meeting of the SEAFDEC Council in Hanoi. The Council recommended that a regional study on eco-labelling should be conducted from the regional perspective as a basis for future considerations.


The regional study on eco-labelling for aquatic products was conducted from November 2005 to February 2006 by SEAFDEC with technical support from the Swedish Board of Fisheries and financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The aim of the study was to conduct a preliminary survey of the current status of sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture production in the ASEAN countries, and to identify opportunities to participate in eco-labelling initiatives.

## Eco-labelling for aquatic products

More than likely, eco-labelling for aquatic products is here to stay, not only in Europe or the west in general, but worldwide. According to experiences from other economic sectors, eco-labelled products will be established and recognized as a principle signalling better management of valuable resources.

The ASEAN eco-labelling study is based on this belief, and here we focus more on the importance and possibilities of supplying products to this likely growing market than debating whether eco-labelling of aquatic products is a passing fluke or something to take in account seriously.

In its report on eco-labelling in 2003, FAO noted that “Engagement in eco-labelling offers developing countries, in particular, the opportunity to promote eco-labelling initiatives accompanied by adequate financial and technical resources in order to offset or compensate some of the costs from improving fisheries management and related implementation of international agreements”.



### Eco-labelling: definition?

The definition of eco-labelling referred to in this study is the general description reflecting ISO 14000-standard.:

- Eco-labelling is a tool to promote products with less negative environmental impact than comparable products.
- Eco-labelling is voluntary. The systems are transparent and should be open for every country and aiming at promoting free trade. Environmental criteria must be relevant and possible to monitor and audit. LCA perspective (life cycle assessment) is a guiding principle.

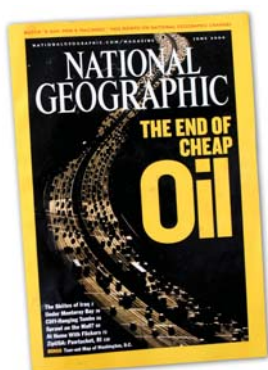
In this article, the authors discuss eco-labelling in the ASEAN region context, highlighting some relevant experience with eco-labelling of aquatic products in Europe, and summarizing outcomes and recommendations from the study.

## A generic perspective

It is very difficult, in Southeast Asia as elsewhere, to recognize every attempt to eco-label or label practices of sustainable fishing or aquaculture management in any region. Our study cannot claim to be complete. The final report presents examples of aquatic production that indicate extraordinary good practice, covering marine as well as brackish and fresh water. We consider sustainable production of fish, crustaceans, seaweed and other organisms that have commercial potential.

Fisheries in our study include fish for human consumption, fish-feed and ornamental fish.

We chose to report on general observations that could have a substantial impact on the future in terms of sustainability



*The days of cheap oil seem to be over. This means that future methods in aquaculture and fisheries will undergo sometimes dramatic changes. Extensive methods with low input of fossil fuels will probably gain advantages on a global market. Pure economy is one factor; impact on the environment another.*





## FAO open to range of management schemes

The following excerpt is taken from the FAO report and show the openness of the organization to a wide range of management schemes in order to include countries at different levels of economic development in the eco-labelling movement.

The meeting recognized that developing countries and countries in transition have special requirements for adopting eco-labelling of fish and fishery products, stressing the importance of facilitating the adoption of eco-labelling by these countries through appropriate measures and international support.

In particular, the meeting noted that when considering means to assess the current state and trends in target stocks:

*"There are many ways in which state and trends in stocks may be evaluated, that fall short of the highly quantitative and data-demanding approaches to stock assessment that are often used for large scale fisheries in developed countries. Use of less elaborate methods for stock assessment should not preclude fisheries from possible certification for eco-labelling. However, it should be noted that, to the extent that the application of such methods results in greater uncertainty about the state of the resource, more precautionary approaches to managing such resources will be required. There is a variety of management measures commonly used in small scale or low value fisheries that nonetheless can achieve quite adequate levels for protection for stocks in the face of uncertainty about the state of the resource. However, in general, use of less elaborate methods will necessitate lower levels of utilization of the resource."*

for the region as a whole or for part of it. We have decided not to limit our recommendations to those applicable to all countries of the region. Even so, it is obvious that discussing eco-labelling at the regional level is important to aquatic production based on long-term economic thinking.

### A broad dialogue

We estimate that overall more than 450 persons have taken part in this exchange of opinions and experiences on eco-labelling in Southeast Asia. Our main objective has been to carry out an inventory of good practices and experiences from the field of eco-labelling fish or other products or practices. But it is also important to recognize that a large number of our meetings focused on the presentation of our study and its background.



### Life Cycle Assessment: what are we talking about?

The complex interaction between a product and the environment can be measured using the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) method. LCA systematically describes and assesses all flows to and from nature, from a cradle to grave perspective. The environmental impact of a product consists of all impacts caused from boat or pond to the consumer.

## Eco-labelling programmes

Eco-labelling programmes usually fall into one of the following categories:

### 1<sup>st</sup> First party labelling schemes

These are established by individual companies based on their own product standards. This form of eco-labelling is also known as self-declaration.

The simplest form is when a fishing boat or company puts its own label on the product, claiming that the product comes from good practice in terms of environmental sustainability. Some of these claims are valid and based on reality, others not. Ultimately, how does the consumer know?

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Second party labelling schemes

These are established by industry associations for their members' products. The members elaborate certification criteria, sometimes by drawing upon external expertise from academia and environmental organisations. Verification of compliance is achieved through internal certification procedures within the industry or employment of external certifying companies.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Third party labelling schemes

These are usually established by a private initiator independently of the producers, distributors and sellers of the labelled product. The initiator could also be a governmental or an international organisation. The criteria selected are usually the result of a multi-stakeholder-process that includes all important stakeholders: fishermen, industry, government, green movement and others. Environmental organisations and consumers generally prefer third-party eco-labelling as it gives the system higher credibility.

In this way, we believe that we have upgraded the knowledge of stakeholders in the region and that we have highlighted the topic in the various organizations that we have visited – an investment for the future. We believe there are reasons to embark on further pilot studies and projects aligned with our recommendations. We have upgraded this interface for considerations of eco-labelling down the road.

## Eco-labelling – a tool for sustainability

Eco-labels are seals of approval rewarded to products that have less negative impact on the environment than other functionally equivalent products. The goal of eco-labelling is to promote sustainable managed aquatic resources and to highlight these products to the consumer. This is important, as it is widely recognized in the international community that the world's commercial fisheries are in distress, and that management schemes in the hands of governments are not good enough to secure this resource for generations to come.

## FAO guidelines

FAO's guidelines for eco-labelling of marine capture fisheries have to some extent hindered the region from getting involved in eco-labelling. FAO's guidelines have been perceived as biased, supporting western style management more than other practices in fishing and management.

Here are a few of the basic FAO principles for eco-labelling:

- *Third party fishery assessment using scientific evidence*
- *Transparent processes with built in stakeholder consultation*
- *A three pronged standard based on sustainability of target species, ecosystems and management systems*

One standpoint in this study is to recognize the importance of compliance with FAO guidelines in devising eco-labelling schemes. Equally important is to advocate international measures to for creative methods to describe and monitor stocks and fishing. It is essential to address the fact that some of the regions most yielding fisheries could be deterred from implementing eco-labelling due to the current lack of capacity and resources of the government agencies in the region in implementing conventional management measures. In that regard, efforts must be made to upgrade trust in tropical fisheries management tools such as co-management schemes, and to highlight existing sustainable management in the region.

## Benefits from credible eco-labelling schemes

### For the environment

- Environmental impacts identified and reduced
- Stocks managed sustainably.

### For the fisheries and aquaculture sectors

- Access to new markets, and protection of existing markets
- Product differentiation in competitive markets
- Confirmation of good management
- Potential for charging a premium on eco-labelled goods.

### For the commercial sector

- Enhanced reputation
- Risk management
- Respond to customers demand for greater responsibility
- Brand recognition and enhanced brand value
- Environmental management is highly appreciated by employees
- Contribution to market transformation

### For society

- Global food security
- Protection and development of livelihoods
- Stakeholder involvement
- Empowerment of individuals and communities
- Transition towards sustainable production and consumption
- Lasting fish stocks, giving food and income today and in the future.

## Potential areas for eco-labelling

Our study does not describe specific operations with names and addresses, but does point out general areas that add up to the future potential for eco-labelling in Southeast Asia. We are certain that in many cases there are extraordinary advantages for countries in the ASEAN region for aquatic production to be eco-labelled. This is partly because:

- The region holds numerous stocks of aquatic organisms that are very strong in a world stigmatised by depleting stocks, and
- The region holds a wide range of extensive methods in aquaculture and capture fisheries that represent advantages compared to other regions, in terms of small inputs of fossil energy, chemicals and antibiotics.

# ISO

## ISO's guiding principles

ISO relies on the following guiding principles for eco-labelling:

1. Quality of standard
2. Transparency of process and governance
3. Adequate, multi-stakeholder participation
4. Voluntary system
5. Impartiality of certification
6. Compliance with its own claims
7. Access for all – regions and size of operation
8. Verifiability – possible to audit
9. Continued improvement of standard.

## Extensive methods

Extensive methods in aquaculture could mean either little inputs of chemicals and antibiotics; substantially less fossil energy used in the production; and/or major advantages in terms of food quality/safety.

## Herbivorous fish

Southeast Asia is well known for the production of herbivorous species deriving from both culture and capture fisheries, while global awareness is growing of the need to move down the trophic levels in order to create sustainability and food security. The export of herbivorous fish from Southeast Asia to western countries is increasing, but consumers are normally expatriates and small groups of westerners used to eating fish such as carp. A small portion of the export actually ends up on plates of enlightened westerners choosing herbivorous fish for either environmental reasons or the desire to explore exotic new tastes.



## The Swedish experience

In July 2004, the first eco-labelled Swedish shrimps were sold at fish auction in Göteborg. In 2006, eco-labelled herring will hopefully be delivered to market, and it is expected that more products from eco-labelled fisheries will develop, as has been the case for other foodstuff sectors. In some European countries, registered growth of eco-labelled food has been over 15% annually.

In Sweden – one of the more progressive European countries in terms of eco-labelling – milk products, fruit and vegetables were eco-labelled in the mid 1980s. Fisheries followed 20 years later! The initiative to create an eco-labelling scheme for capture fisheries came rather from the authorities than from the green movement. The Swedish Board of Fisheries was a major driving force, backed up by the European commission, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Swedish industry.

### Politics are not enough

European countries have to a large extent failed in their ambitions to create sustainable management for their commercial stocks of fish. In Sweden, this is certainly the case. Cod is historically the most important species and the situation is critical for the stocks on the west coast, causing the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to recommend zero catch.

The three main reasons for developing eco-labelling are:

- Politics and policies are necessary but not sufficient to protect the resources. Consumer preferences are considered important to support the sustainable management of fisheries
- There are no incentives for fishers to choose best practices in terms of sustainability, and
- Swedish consumers want eco-labelled food. Eighty percent of Swedish fish-buyers say they are willing to pay more for eco-labelled products from capture fisheries.

### Multi-stakeholder participation

Eight organisations financed the Swedish/Nordic scheme. Most of these are governmental but there are also stakeholders from the economic sector. The question was what organisation should set the criteria and run the scheme. KRAV (the largest third party eco-labelling-organisation for foodstuffs in Sweden) accepted to carry out the job, being the most experienced third party certifying body for foodstuffs in Sweden. It took about three years to create the criteria and launch the system, bringing the first shrimp to the auction. That might seem like a lot of time. Involving all the stakeholders (fishermen and their organisations, green movement, different levels of government, science and businesses) takes time, but this is a good investment. Everybody round the table has to be fairly happy about the labelling, otherwise the scheme will fail. Excluding the green movement from the dialogue would save time in the short term, but in the long run would most certainly be a mistake.

### Products for export

The first eco-labelled product was shrimp, which is only sold fresh on the Swedish market. The next product eco-labelled will be pickled and canned herring. This product is very interesting for a European market. When sold to Germany, the herring will be re-certified by Naturland in order to be recognized by the consumer. How large the price premium is for eco-labelled fish from the Nordic waters must be a guess. After about a year on the market, the price of shrimp on the auction is about 10% higher. There is nothing indicating that consumers will treat the herring differently.

### Shrimp-criteria in short

- Well managed stock
- Selective devices to exclude by-catch of fish
- Extended report on by-catch
- Eco-labelled hydraulic fluids and grease, and best quality diesel
- Self-monitoring system
- No colouring of catch, and
- Compulsory training in sustainable management of marine resources.



*This 17-year old crab-fisher in Koh Kong, Cambodia, is part of a very promising development of sustainable small-scale coastal fishery. The number of boats is growing and still the yields of fish and crustaceans seem to be stable.*

*The export from the villages is limited and not directed to a market that recognizes eco-labelling. Even so, these villages could export eco-labelled products in the form of eco-tourism where visitors pay to be part of coastal life based on sustainable aquatic production.*



The omnivorous tilapia, for example, is popular in western markets. It is currently widely grown in intensive conditions that could not be defined as sustainable, as it is fed with pellets rich in fish protein from capture fisheries. But tilapia has the potential to have only a small environmental impact if they are raised like herbivorous plankton filtering fish. An eco-labelling initiative could support a shift in today's tilapia culture practise, as it would provide a price incentive to skip marine fish meal.

The potential of exported herbivorous fish is based on:

- The evident environmental advantages of herbivores, as no marine protein has to be used.
- There are several herbivorous species that are well suited for western standards of taste and aesthetics

- Production costs for herbivorous fish is lower than for carnivorous species. The difference in cost between the two will probably increase as a consequence of higher energy costs and increasing cost of fish meal
- The ambition to substitute unspecified marine protein in aquaculture with alternative protein sources will take a long time to be implemented, and
- The road to eco-labelled herbivorous fish is shorter than that for carnivorous species.

### Eco-labelled fishfeed

During the study, several dialogue-partners mentioned that sooner or later the region will have to start developing a sustainable feed for cultivated fish and shrimp. One partner emphasizing the importance of doing so is the FAO



*The regions purse-seine fishing for tuna might be a concept to eco-label. To establish whether the method gives environmental advantages or not, many aspects have to be surveyed, such as the potential for excluding endangered species – fish and mammals; the use of fossil fuels and the negative impact on marine biotopes.*



## Great Britain's 'Farmers own'

As eco-labelling develops as a means of assuring consumers that their demand for sustainability is being met by producers, we see that consumers are pushing development of trade towards markets resembling those that used to exist decades ago. The 'Farmers own' phenomenon in the UK is an interesting example of this.

'Farmers own' is a concept in which small-scale farmers and fishers sell their own products at a local market in urban areas, with most customers being highly educated, high income urban dwellers. First-hand selling to customers is the keyword. Products do not necessarily have to be organic, although many are, as customers in this category understand the importance of less environmental impact.

Since the first 'Farmers own' market started in Bath ten years ago, their number has grown to 520 nationwide. London alone holds ten 'Farmers own' open all year round. The Department of Agriculture claims that 'Farmers own' is the most important factor for small scale businesses to develop. A similar situation is found in the US.

Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, which argues that western consumers will not accept the use of unspecified marine protein much longer. But is it possible to find marine stocks of fish that can be the basis for eco-labelled feed?

The importance of the issue of feed indicates that extensive solar-powered aquaculture systems relying on herbivorous fish, in some cases independent of external feed, could deliver market advantages in the future. High prices would compensate for low stocking density, on a market where environmental concern is highlighted.

Other ways to solve the dilemma with marine protein from controversial stocks is to find protein from terrestrial systems. As an example of other countries in the region doing similar research, Indonesia has a promising project to produce maggots raised on oil-palm press-cakes. Four kilos of oil-palm waste is converted into one kilogram of maggots from the black soldier fly. The process can be made



Several dialogue-partners during the study have mentioned that sooner or later the region will have to start develop a sustainable feed for cultivated fish and shrimp. FAO for instance has the clear opinion that western consumers will not accept the use of unspecified marine protein much longer. Is it possible to find marine stocks of fish that can be the base of eco-labelled feed?

## Eco procurement – public sector on the move

Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, has made a political standpoint that 85% of the food cooked in public kitchens (schools, hospitals and others) should be eco-labelled by 2008. Meanwhile, the third biggest city in Sweden, Malmö, has gone further, stating that 100% of the food served in schools in 2010 should be eco-labelled. Many other European cities, regions and national offices have already made similar statements. Concerning eco-labelled fish, this causes problems, as there are not enough eco-labelled fish-products on the market to meet the demand. This market-failure forms a motive for the ASEAN region to be much more proactive, and to form partnerships with the public sectors looking for green fish compatible to their policies and statements.



*If the feed-issue is so important, this indicates that semi-intensive solar-powered aquaculture-systems, in some cases independent of external feed, could gain a market advantages now and in the future. High price compensate for lower stocking density on a market where environmental concern is highlighted.*

locally and the price for the protein rich feed is less than that of marine origin. Of course, effects on taste, structure and quality parameters of the fish should be studied first.

be a local market, a regional market, or even a global market, or perhaps all of them. In our study, we have not narrowed the scope to a specific market.

### Barefoot monitoring

One alternative for enhancing the limited resources of government agencies and academic research and science institutions is 'barefoot monitoring'. This approach uses the green movement, schools and other parts of civil society to monitor aquatic systems, to gather statistics and to safeguard the principles set down for management while – at the same time – raising awareness in the community. Children are always good ambassadors for good practice. There are many examples of such approaches being used around the world. The green movement would no doubt agree that under certain circumstances approaches such as these boost the credibility of eco-labelling.

The dialogues in the countries visited showed that in order to get a price benefit from eco-labelled products you probably have to address a market in a developed country. Such markets could be the starting point for giving more incentives to producers and trade to develop their market awareness and eventually to go local, introducing eco-labelled aquatic products to the domestic and regional market.



Leaving aside whether the starting point is local or international, we expect that in a few years time, eco-labelling will also be an important factor in Southeast Asia. Consumers will demand guidance as to what products have less damaging environmental impacts, and at the same time, stand for social awareness.

### New markets for greater environmental awareness

If you develop a system for eco-labelled fisheries, you probably have a specific target market in mind. This might

When presenting our case and the possible future for eco-labelling in the region, we must emphasize that eco-labelling of one kind or another is already present in all the countries of the region. Producers of vegetables, fruit, dairy products and



*The recognition of ISO 9 000 and 14 000 is wide spread in the region and most countries have experience and competence from setting up criteria and organisational capacity for systems similar to eco-labelling schemes. What organisation/organisations that has the best advantages for leading a future project of developing eco-labelling further in the region is an open question. More self evident is that the process of developing criteria should be based on multi-stakeholder-participation. Clean and Green working in the Philippines is one of the well experienced organisations in the region.*





*Myanmar stakeholders in the fisheries sector clearly claim that their aquaculture and capture fisheries are well up to the challenge of meeting strict criteria for eco-labelling. Maybe that's a fact. Would it be possible for the western international body to open the borders for eco-labelled products from Myanmar as part of a constructive dialog focused on sustainability?*

others make claims that their products have a less negative impact on the environment than others. Claims are made by putting some kind of label or tag on the package referring to some sort of good practice.

The growing jungle of labels and tags carrying all sorts of claims of better practice is a natural function of an economy in transition. When shopping is done at the local market, where consumers actually meet the producers, no label is needed. I buy my carrots or my tools from Mr. Good Guy because I know him, his skills and methods. The growing distance between producer and consumer means that the old kinds of trust built on personal relations will be exchanged for new trust-building forms of communication. Now producers must build brands that stand for quality, safety, environmental concern and social concern. Obviously, the distance to the consumer is fuelling an ever-growing market for advertising and packaging, taking the place of Mr Good Guy who used to produce, market and sell his products all by himself.

In Europe and other western economies, we see an interesting development of market communication at the

time. The interest in the environment is stable and the will to make a difference when shopping is constant. Eco-labelling is growing rapidly in most western countries in terms of economic turnover and the number of products labelled.

## Support from government and non-government organizations

Few if any of the visited countries in the region have had substantial support from government Trade Councils or similar in promoting eco-labelled aquatic products abroad. Participating in foreign trade shows is a common procedure, and the day the market wants eco-labelled, communication about this special product-quality will commence.

It could be interesting if the region supported the dialogue on what eco-labelled products could be delivered from this region. Why not in tradeshows in 2007 or 2008? This would include the presentation of products on display, described in terms of sustainability. This will help in creating an interface with the market, while ensuring that western standards take into account specific Southeast Asian perspectives. This roadshow could create a major discussion on the future of aquatic production, this time with the ASEAN region more responsible for establishing the frames of discussion. The advantage of describing the problem and addressing solutions is of great value. Government, business, certifiers, the green movement, media and all other stakeholders would benefit from an initiative like this.

## Timing is everything

What would be the best timing for launching eco-labelled products from fisheries in the ASEAN region? Some countries are already exporting substantial volumes, mostly of shrimp but also fish.

Of course there cannot be one correct answer, but a qualified guess is that it is necessary to start now and to take the needed time setting up organisations and standards in order to do the job correctly. This way it is possible to avoid repeated turning backs to repair what has been done too hastily. Earlier, we talked about the importance of multi-stakeholder-involvement. It always takes time to involve and to form meetings with many partners. But this is essential in order to create a model with which everyone is fairly satisfied.

*Food concepts are exported all over the globe. Thai cuisine is the fastest growing international cuisine in the world. From an environment and health oriented standpoint: let's hope that the Southeast Asian way of life will stand strong in competition. The picture is from Bangkok.*



Would it not be best to enter the already substantial western market as quickly as possible? Not necessarily. In Germany, eco-labelled food had already appeared in the 1970s, and in the rest of Europe mid 1980s. But this was just vegetables, fruit and dairy products. Eco-labelled fishery products have only been introduced in western markets in the past five years. Eco-labelled aquatic products are therefore new and exotic to most consumers, and a great effort will be needed before they reach the level of other food stuffs.

Good timing is never a coincidence; good timing, when delivering a product or a concept on the market, is created. It should not be a wild guess.

## Multi-stakeholder involvement

In order to establish criteria and to get products accepted, it is necessary to form standards and structural capacity for eco-labelling with multi-stakeholder involvement. If managed well, multi-stakeholder participation also means that the principles and products are marketed long before they are presented to the consumer. A positive aspect of involving green movements in forming criteria is that they will write about the process in their newsletters and magazines positively and constructively.

The greater the distance of produce from the market, the greater the need for the credibility provided by third party labelling. Distance between producer and consumers comprises several factors. Including not only physical distance, but also economic, political (such as, in the worse case, embargoes) and cultural dimensions. There can also be a distance in terms of taste and cuisine style.

It is therefore important to activate all stakeholders that can help to minimize distance. Tourism has turned many Southeast Asian countries into "neighbours" for many Europeans. Does this give an advantage when selling eco-labelled fish to Europeans? Yes, definitely! In short, it means that it is important to use many carriers of the message bringing the supplier and the buyer closer. Is it possible to launch the idea that eco-labelling should be considered a category products to be handled less restrictively in case of a trade barrier or embargo? If so, where should this issue be raised?

## Finding and "courting" the big ones

In many western countries, 50-80% of consumers say that they are willing to pay more for eco-labelled fish. Of course, this gives the retailers a good reason to supply eco-labelled aquatic products. Still, there are well-defined markets that could be even more interesting in eco-labelling. Eco procurement (also known as 'green procurement') is a rising star in Europe. Most countries have national, regional and local strategies to promote eco-labelled products bought by the public sector at the national, regional and local levels.



## Potential for fast food and global retailers

If a major fast food retailer such as McDonalds were to commit to producing fish burgers from tilapia, as it is presently considering, perhaps 15% of the world's fish burgers would be produced from herbivorous fish – a significant potential for eco-labelling aquatic products. Similarly, big retailers like Marks & Spencer's, Coop, Carrefour and others are gaining market shares and could benefit from introducing new species with better environmental connotations. Many initiatives have of course been taken to investigate possibilities that advantageous for both exporters and importers. The ongoing debate in western countries about over-fishing of the world's waters will keep the focus on the need to provide aquatic protein in more sustainable ways. More studies and initiatives are needed to provide evidence that stocks and production in the ASEAN region could export large quantities of aquatic products in terms of security of delivery, price and environmental sustainability.

## Future directions for the region

The outcomes of the study and the recommendations by the team were presented at the Regional Technical Consultation on International Fish Trade and Related Issues, held in February 2006 in Bangkok. The following recommendations for the ASEAN region were made:

- Eco-labelling schemes in the region should be used as a tool to promote sustainable fisheries practices;
- A clear understanding and definition of eco-labelling in the regional context, with development of appropriate criteria and standards, should be developed, and local capacity for eco-labelling and public awareness on sustainability issues should be built up;
- Accrediting and certifying bodies for the region should be either set up or identified, while a clear recognition of the roles of the different stakeholders, especially the government and industry, should be given with an emphasis on the importance of a inter-stakeholder dialogue;
- The ASEAN countries and SEAFDEC should conduct a study on the potential, difficulties and impacts of the FAO international guidelines for eco-labelling for fish and fishery products from marine capture fisheries in the region, and should prepare necessary inputs for future development at FAO;
- Market studies to further analyse potential

markets for eco-labelled products and to investigate how to marketing the products should be conducted;

- Pilot projects to demonstrate how to implement eco-labelling scheme with existing sustainable practices should be initiated; and
- Relevant international/regional institutions like SEAFDEC, FAO RAP, NACA, MRC and the ASEAN Secretariat should take an active coordinated role in the further development of eco-labelling for aquatic products in the ASEAN region.

The ASEAN-SEAFDEC Fisheries Consultative Group meeting took place in April in Brunei Darussalam. Based on the outcomes of this regional study and the suggestions made during the RTC on International Fish Trade and Related Issues, the meeting noted that there is no clear policy direction on the issue, and supported initiatives to explore further the concept and approach in the regional context, including the implementation of pilot studies to provide a basis for future in-depth discussion among the member countries.

The meeting also suggested that a regional strategy on the issue need to be developed. The strategy would also take into consideration the following:

- The role of government in addressing issues of eco-labelling both in terms of being a market driven incentive and a tool to promote sustainable practices;
- Active participation in future amendments/development of initiatives related to eco-labelling at relevant international fora;
- Specificity and uniqueness of fisheries in the ASEAN and SEAFDEC member countries; and
- Practicability of any labelling scheme and readiness of fisheries sub-sectors or fishery products.

## Readings

- Report of the Expert Consultation on the Development of International Guidelines for Ecolabelling of fish and fishery products (FAO Fisheries Report No. 726, FIPP/R726 technical consultation Rome 14-17 2003) Available online: [www.fao.org/documents/show\\_cdr.asp?url\\_file=/DOCREP/006/Y4941E/Y4941E00.HTM](http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/DOCREP/006/Y4941E/Y4941E00.HTM)
- Regional Study on Eco-labelling of Aquatic Products: General Views and Future Considerations for the ASEAN Region



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