

# Conserving and Managing the Sea Cucumber Resources in Southeast Asia: SEAFDEC Initiative

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The present trend in the ASEAN towards overfishing of sea cucumbers in commercial species especially under the Families Holothuriidae and Stichopodidae to support international market demand, has become an urgent concern in the international community, particularly at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). There have been very limited studies and collection of information on the biology and production of sea cucumbers in the ASEAN countries. Nonetheless, sea cucumbers clearly represent an economically important fisheries resource in the region but inadequate attention is given to the management of these species and its fisheries status is not very well known.

The ongoing global initiative to possibly include sea cucumber in commercial species in the CITES Appendices has alarmed the ASEAN countries as this would greatly affect the region's sea cucumber fisheries. In order to address such concern, ASEAN and SEAFDEC convened the Preparatory Meeting on Environmental Related Tasks in October 2005 in Bangkok, Thailand to discuss this issue. The outcome was submitted to the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of ASEAN- SEAFDEC Fisheries Consultative Group (FCG) and the 38<sup>th</sup> Meeting of SEAFDEC Council held in April 2006 in Brunei Darussalam, during which the following proposals were approved:

- Conduct of a regional comprehensive compilation of data and information on sea cucumbers; and
- The management of sea cucumber resources should be the purview of competent national fisheries agency

Subsequently, SEAFDEC organized the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Regional Technical Consultation on International Fisheries Related Issues in September 2006 in Phuket Thailand, where updated information on sea cucumber in commercial species proposed for listing under CITES and the relevant initiatives undertaken by FAO were provided. The



*Sea cucumber: Photo provided by M.F. Nievaes during the Regional Technical Consultation on Stock Enhancement of Threatened Species of International Concern, Philippines, July 2005*

Consultation reaffirmed the need to conduct a regional study on sea cucumber fisheries, utilization and trade and reiterated its recommendation that economically important sea cucumber species should not be listed under any of the CITES Appendices.

## Conservation and Management Efforts

In order to support the aforementioned recommendation, SEAFDEC Secretariat launched in June 2007 a regional activity on Information Collection of Sea Cucumber Fisheries, Utilization, and Trade under the SEAFDEC Program on Environmental Related Tasks in Southeast Asia supported by the Trust Fund Program of the Government of Japan. For such regional activity, each member country nominates their respective National Focal Point who will conduct the relevant desk study and will be designated member of the 'SEAFDEC Ad-hoc Regional Working Group on Sea Cucumber Fisheries'. The Working Group will be involved mainly in the planning and coordination work on sea cucumber, its resource utilization, management and trade. Their output will be assessed for the possibility of



developing national action plans and policy recommendations on the conservation and management of sea cucumbers.

Towards the end of 2007, SEAFDEC will organize the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Expert Consultation on Sea Cucumber to discuss the outcome of the regional study on sea cucumbers and come up with policy recommendations and management strategies for the region's sea cucumbers conservation and management. In addition, findings at the FAO Workshop on Sustainable Use and Management of Sea Cucumber Fisheries scheduled in November 2007 will also be considered during the Expert Consultation. The regional synthesis and policy recommendations on sea cucumbers conservation and management in Southeast Asia resulting from the Consultation will be submitted to the SEAFDEC Council and the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Fisheries (ASWGFi) for consideration and support.

SEAFDEC is keeping itself abreast with the developments related to the proposal to list sea cucumbers species in the CITES Appendices. At the CITES CoP14 in June 2007, SEAFDEC participated in the sea cucumber working group to raise the common concern and safeguard the interest of the Member Countries. The adopted decisions concluded to bring such concern to the attention of FAO during its planned Workshop in November 2007. Although the proposed listing of sea cucumbers in commercial species

under the CITES Appendices was not done during the CoP14, additional measures to conserve and manage the sea cucumbers might be brought up at the CoP15. In this regard, the ASEAN Member Countries is preparing sufficient facts and related scientific information that would support the concerns of this fisheries sector.

Meanwhile, SEAFDEC in collaboration with the Member Countries will continue to echo its efforts on the conservation and management of sea cucumbers in the international arena, and this article will hopefully help SEAFDEC publicize such efforts. A related article in this issue illustrates the initiative of the Philippines to conserve its sea cucumber resources in line with the efforts being demonstrated by SEAFDEC.

### About The Author

Rujarek Bumrasarinpai is currently working as the Program Administration Officer of the SEAFDEC Secretariat. After obtaining M.Sc. Fisheries Science from Kasetsart University, Thailand in 2003, she started working with SEAFDEC under the Policy and Program Office of the Secretariat. She is now involved mainly in programs related to Assistance for Capacity Building in the Region particularly those that Address International Trade Related Issues, and Environmental Related Tasks in Southeast Asia.

## CALL FOR ARTICLES

Several issues of Fish for the People were already published from 2003 to 2006 and the Publication is now on its Fifth Volume. We are inviting in-house writers who are interested in promoting the activities of SEAFDEC in the Southeast Asian region as well as writers from the SEAFDEC Member Countries, to contribute articles for the Publication.

Fish for the People takes several sections, such as: Special Feature (usually giving a theme to the issue), Fisheries Management, Aquaculture, Fish Trade and Post-harvest Technology, Announcements on important SEAFDEC events, and the Event Calendar.

Fish for the People is currently a free publication. It receives a generous support from the Government of Japan's Trust Fund. The Publication primarily intends to make known the activities of SEAFDEC as well as other relevant fisheries issues from the SEAFDEC Member Countries. While the focus is on promoting fishery issues in the Southeast Asian

region, we also welcome articles on important fishery issues from other regions external to SEAFDEC.

An Editorial Team for the Publication was organized in 2006 comprising the editor-representatives from the SEAFDEC Departments. Writers from the Departments are therefore, requested to contact their respective Editor-Representatives or they can also communicate directly to the Secretariat-based Editors ([fish@seafdec.org](mailto:fish@seafdec.org)).

The Publication is policy-orientated. It is not a forum for research findings and it is not also intended to provide detailed technical information. In other words, the Publication does not contain typical scientific papers but instead articles that are in popular or layman language and easy to read papers especially to all our stakeholders. Popular and readable articles that address the various issues discussed at the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Millennium Conference will be most desired. The articles could also discuss newly emerging issues relevant to the sustainable development of fisheries in the Southeast Asian region.