

### Shrimp Destruction and the Global Fisheries Crisis

The money, the environmental devastation, and the toll on affected human communities being caused by shrimp production are driven by a much greater force; worldwide the world's oceans are being plundered in order to maintain supplies to markets where a virtually insatiable ongoing demand for seafood is intensifying. The booming shrimp market is just one destructive manifestation of the overarching concern that in meeting ever increasing market demand in Japan, the U.S. and Europe, nature and other dependent human communities must suffer the destructive consequences. Increasing market demand for fish and other fish-based products have led to a massive intensification and industrialization of fishing worldwide, to such an extent that fish populations in virtually every major fishing region of the world are considered to now be fully fished, over fished depleted or collapsed. This is particularly true of the high-valued commercially exploited species, such as wild shrimp. Virtually all of the world's major stocks of wild shrimp are considered to be either fully or over-exploited.

The resulting uncertainties surrounding the future availability of fish in a world where fish stocks are declining while demand continuously increases have motivated many governments, corporations, and entrepreneurs to intensify development of various systems to raise aquatic organisms in more controlled environments. Aqua culture, as the process is generically known (mari culture is the term applied to farming in the marine environment), is being held out as the hope for sustaining the level of fish supplies to meet rising market demand in the face of a deepening global fisheries crisis.

Not all forms of aqua culture are so destructive as shrimp farming has proven to be; indeed, some types of aqua culture offer great hope for enhancing the lives of hundreds of millions who are nutritionally insecure, low-income people. Unfortunately, international assistance to improve this prospect has paled in comparison to support for the production of farmed shrimp for export. Money from the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and other development assistance agencies of Japan, the U.S. and European countries have provided vastly greater support, as measured in capital and staff, to capital-intensive shrimp production for export, distracting attention and resources away from, for instance, inland freshwater aqua culture which has far greater potential to solve the problems of underdevelopment, poverty and malnutrition which occurs in rural areas of many tropical Asian nations. Putting faith in a global strategy to promote the expansion of coastal and marine aqua culture, hoping to make up the projected shortfalls in future world fisheries supplies, is a woefully misguided strategy. For one thing, such an approach glosses over the very grave environmental dangers and excessive demands on natural resources associated with the wholesale expansion of commercialized coastal and marine farming systems. Furthermore, it is the cornerstone of a longer term plan that ultimately aims at the wholesale conversion of the oceans' biological diversity into mono culture cropping systems geared to the exclusive production of high-value commodities, like shrimp, for the world's wealthy few. An analogy can be drawn in the terrestrial environment with the destruction of the Amazon's rainforests and all the complex bio diversity they contain in order to make space for grazing cattle. Such a strategy also creates a disincentive for governments which should be hard at work on the urgent need to push back the global fisheries crisis, by instituting fundamental, wide-ranging reforms to rid the oceans of the vast fishing overcapacity and destructive fishing practices that underpin over fishing on a global scale. Instead of focusing on solving the problems of world fisheries and putting them on the path to sustainability, governments and industry have grabbed hold of a convenient escape hatch in aqua culture - one that that allows business as usual to be maintained, at least in terms of maintaining supplies of fish to northern markets where consumers can afford to pay higher prices for luxury products, even though the practices that underpin production are environmentally destructive and unsustainable economically.

while it may be that investment in appropriate forms of aqua culture could do a lot to help alleviate malnutrition in some developing countries, the current emphasis on the production of high-value species for export is leading in an entirely different direction. This emphasis is not on how to provide a readily accessible source of

fishery,crisis.txt

protein for the world's malnourished through integrated fish farming systems that are ecologically sound, even environmentally beneficial; it is instead being directed largely at the production of high-value species for export to wealthy overseas markets where people can afford to pay high prices for such luxuries as farmed shrimp and salmon.

The resulting technological advancements in breeding and nutrition of such high-value, farmed aquatic organisms, combined with favorable government policies that encourage rather than limit expansion, massive investment flows and financial incentives, and increasing market demand for seafood have provided an explosive set of conditions for the dramatic expansion of the shrimp farming industry in Asia and Latin America. But the developing global shrimp industry is environmentally destructive, intrinsically unsustainable, and inequitable in social terms. It has become a destructive force in a world where more effort and investment should be directed to solving the environmental and social crisis in world fisheries in a manner that ensures sustainable employment and food security for the hundreds of millions of people who rely on fish and fishing as their basis for life and livelihood.