

Putting Demands on the Table

Alarmed at the rapid growth of destructive types of aqua culture, like shrimp farming, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from shrimp producing and consuming countries around the world are organizing to halt the spread of destructive shrimp farms, since their governments are failing to act. In May 1995, Greenpeace and 24 other NGOs, some representing people living in the communities that are directly feeling the impacts of the shrimp farming boom, submitted an unprecedented "NGO Statement on Unsustainable Aqua culture" to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) meeting in New York at the United Nations. The group urged their governments to move quickly to ensure the development of aqua culture that is compatible with the social, cultural and economic interests of coastal communities, and ensure that in future such developments are sustainable, socially equitable and ecologically sound. The NGO statement to the United Nations was followed up more recently in an NGO Forum on Shrimp Aqua culture held in Choluteca, Honduras (Oct. 13-16, 1996), organized by Greenpeace together with Coddeffagolf, a Honduran grassroots group. Twenty-one NGOs from Latin America, India, the US and Sweden concluded the meeting with the adoption of the Choluteca Declaration. The Choluteca Declaration reaffirms the demands contained in the NGO Statement on Unsustainable Aqua culture submitted to the United Nations earlier in the year, but went further in some aspects. The most important of these is that the Choluteca Declaration calls for a GLOBAL MORATORIUM on new shrimp farm construction. Additionally, it calls on governments and the industry to put a halt to human rights abuses in the shrimp aqua culture industry and amplifies several of the demands contained in the NGO CSD Statement. A 'plan of action' accompanies the Choluteca Declaration and outlines the course of action for the implementation of the Declaration that the Latin American NGOs involved in the meeting agree to pursue both individually and collectively.

Generally speaking, these concerned non-governmental organizations are insisting that governments apply the precautionary approach to aqua culture development, which includes integrated approaches to development planning in coastal areas and the use of environmental and social impact assessments prior to aqua culture development, with ongoing monitoring of the environmental and social impacts when, and if, such operations are approved. The NGOs also seek assurances from their governments that coastal fishing and farming communities are not adversely affected by aqua culture development or operations. This requires protection of mangrove forests, wetlands and other ecologically sensitive coastal areas, and assurances that abandoned or degraded aqua culture sites are ecologically rehabilitated and that the companies or industry responsible bear the cost of rehabilitation.

The NGOs are also demanding that governments enforce prohibitions on the wholesale conversion of agricultural or cultivable land to aqua culture use, the use of toxic and bioaccumulative compounds in aqua culture operations, pollution of surrounding areas, the development and use of genetically modified organisms in aqua culture and the use of exotic/alien species. The NGOs also call on governments to prohibit aqua culture practices that cause the salinisation or depletion of fresh water supplies, and ban the use of feeds in aqua culture consisting of fish that is or could be used as food for people.

There is also a need to ensure that the collection of wild larvae to stock shrimp ponds does not adversely affect species bio diversity in the areas where collection takes place. Another key demand of the NGOs is put to the multi-lateral development banks, bilateral aid agencies, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and other relevant national and international development assistance organizations that they stop funding or otherwise promoting aqua culture development that is inconsistent with the above criteria.