

International Pressure Grows Against WWF's Shoddy Shrimp Certification Standards

Human rights, consumer groups and environmental groups from around the world have been gathering their forces to protest against the planned launch of the World Wildlife Fund's Aquaculture Stewardship Council and its multi-faceted "seafood certification standards."

WWF's statement at the opening of the European Seafood Exposition that the Aquaculture Dialogues "were the most thorough and intensive painstaking standards process ever in fish farming," must be seriously questioned, as there are many, including those who have signed the attached open letter of protest, that their "dialogue" was not a fair and open one, and the results of their \$2 million effort to establish "fair standards" are not representative of the majority of affected resource users whose input into the whole standard setting process was shunted out from the very design and implementation of that process. As well, we must bring into serious question the standards now planned for release later this year for such contentious industries as shrimp and salmon farming.

We have especially been closely following the dialogue process on shrimp, and so can comment more knowledgeably on this standard setting process imitated by WWF about three years ago.

In a searing critical assessment of the so-called "shrimp standards" sent today to leading members of WWF, the Shrimp Aquaculture Dialogue Committee and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council, campaigners claim that the organisation's plans to certify the industrial aquaculture production of shrimp have from the start been heavily influenced by the vested interests of the aquaculture industry, and do not reflect or take into account the wishes of local communities and indigenous peoples who live alongside and are affected by these aquaculture farms. WWF has miserably failed to meet with representatives of affected communities in six different aquaculture regions across the world, paying only lip service to involving local resource users to truly dialogue with them concerning their real views on the aquaculture industry.

One reason that the so-called "aquaculture dialogue" was so inherently biased in favor of the aquaculture industry was that WWF had predetermined what the results of its "dialogue process" would be. We can simply point to the fact that the certification body run by WWF was in part funded by the seafood industry¹, and that the individual employed by WWF to run the process, was previously employed as a regional vice-president for a controversial aquaculture multinational, that has been widely accused of

1 Last month WWF announced a partnership with SYSCO, the largest food distributor in the US, to assess the sourcing of its farmed fish species, in return for assistance in funding the Aquaculture dialogues http://www.fishupdate.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/12365/WWF_partners_with_SYSCO_on_sustainable_seafood.html _ 17 April 2009

labour violations and environmental destruction.²

“WWF is wrong to claim their standards include inputs from local “stakeholders” when the main body of those stakeholders- the local resource users, who are directly affected by the industry- did not have any voice in determining these ‘standards,’ states Natasha Ahmad , of bAsia Solidarity Against Industrial Aquaculture (ASIA) Secretariat.

“These WWF/ ShAD standards are just one more ‘pie-in-the-sky’ attempt to justify continuing to expand the profits of an unsustainable and destructive industry, that could very well result in further loss of mangrove forests and displacement of local communities,” adds Alfredo Quarto, of Mangrove Action Project.

”WWF continues to ignore the risk that their shrimp certification scheme may result in actually increasing demand for shrimp, thus increasing the expansion of the bad practices that certification was supposedly trying to address through these standards,” says Riza Damanik, Coordinator of the Indonesian NGO KIARA.

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Notes to Editor:

The rapid rise in global demand for cheap shrimp and farmed salmon has caused extensive degradation of mangrove wetlands and other coastal ecosystems and subsequent losses in biodiversity. These losses have also destroyed livelihoods among local communities and indigenous peoples in many nations across the global South.

Shrimp: At a time when shrimp is the most popular seafood in the U.S., and growing in popularity in Europe and Japan, most consumers don't realize the extensive problems their appetite for shrimp engenders. 90% of shrimp consumed in the U.S. and EU are imported from countries where mangrove ecosystems have been recently cleared to establish vast stretches of shrimp ponds dug into once productive wetland soils. This causes serious declines in biodiversity and related wild fisheries, shoreline erosion, increased susceptibility to hurricanes and tsunamis, and releases massive quantities of

² The head of WWF's aquaculture dialogue program is Jose Villaon, who previously managed a 470 acre shrimp farm in Mazatlan Mexico, and worked for Marine Harvest in Guayaquil Ecuador as Vice President of Shrimp Farm Production for 11 years.

carbon, which had previously been safely stored beneath mangrove roots, thus contributing to climate change. There are also many health issues raised by eating farmed shrimp grown in chemical soups of antibiotics, pesticides and other contaminants. For more information log onto <http://www.mangroveactionproject.org/issues/shrimp-farming/shrimp-farming>.

Salmon: Similar issues pervade the fin-fish aquaculture industries. Salmon farming is one such industry leading to massive escapes of non-native Atlantic salmon into Pacific Ocean waters, while endangering native Pacific salmon and other marine life because of disease and parasite outbreaks, pollution and overuse/misuse of antibiotics potentially causing dangerous pathogens to develop antibiotic resistance.

http://www.puresalmon.org/fact_sheets.html

Feed: salmon and shrimp are carnivores, and for every kilo of the product on the supermarket shelf, several kilos of wild caught fish and frequently GMO-sourced soya, are used to feed the farmed salmon and shrimp. The sheer amount of food needed to feed shrimp and salmon on an industrial scale is destroying ecosystems and livelihoods on land and at sea in Latin America, where much of these feedstuffs are sourced from. See:

http://www.theecologist.org/pages/ecologist_media.asp?podcast_id=105

Certification: Scientific research carried out in Indonesia to assess the effectiveness of certification schemes on farmed shrimp in the region, found a catalogue of systemic problems associated with certification, and concluded that, “*these systems may never fulfill any of their overarching objectives such as long term sustainability or reduced consumption of non-certified shrimps*”

<http://www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/upload/Foreningsdokument/Rapporter/rap-inter-shrimp-naturland.pdf>

Open Letter to WWF, Its Aquaculture Dialogue and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council

From human rights, consumer groups and environmental groups from around the world to protest against the planned launch of the World Wildlife Fund's “shrimp certification standards.”

(Note: *We paste our letter and signatures gathered thus far, making the point that we are at the start of signature gathering now, but will have many more to add later as the letter gets more attention and support internationally.*)

1st May, 2011

Dear ShAD/GSC members,

After careful and considered reflection on the draft standards and the whole WWF-ShAD (Shrimp Aquaculture Dialogue) process, we the undersigned Conscientious Objectors -- NGOs working with local communities in the shrimp producer-nations and consumers in the shrimp-importing nations -- have unanimously decided that we cannot support the ShAD General Steering Committee (ShAD/GSC) and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council's (ASC) intentions or actions towards establishing standards for shrimp aquaculture certification. Many others who have added their names and organizational affiliations to our list have also joined us in our protest.

We must therefore continue our course to speak out publicly and campaign against the intent and the process that WWF-ShAD has endeavoured to undertake. The historical record and scientific evidence both indicate that certification will do much harm to both Local Resource Users and the coastal marine environment. The following reasons stand out among many others as indicators that we COs must continue to strongly oppose the ShAD process and the intended ASC and organize a wider resistance against ShAD and other shrimp certification schemes in both Europe and the USA:

- There has never been involvement nor representation in WWF-ShAD's so-called dialogue process for the majority of *stakeholders* or, more aptly, the Local Resource Users who are adversely affected by the shrimp farm industry in the producer nations. ShAD's *stakeholders* are overwhelmingly those invested in the growth of the industry.
- The ShAD/GSC has resolutely refrained from undertaking or commissioning serious research that would result in meaningful and verifiable feedback from Local Resource Users in the manner prescribed by the CBD/TEEB (Convention on Biological Diversity/The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity).
- The GSC process for selecting its board members has not been fair from the beginning and is not representative of a transparent and democratic process. As such, the standards overwhelmingly represent industry interests -- for example: the whole of Africa is "represented" on the ShAD/GSC by shrimp industry nominees from Madagascar.
- Continued lack of proper legislation and enforcement in producer-nations makes adherence to any certification standards impractical.
- With each revision to the draft, the standards and their evaluation criteria have been progressively and deliberately diluted by the GSC to ensure that at least 20% of the existing shrimp industry can be certified immediately after the Standards are released. The process clearly demonstrates the bias of the ShAD/GSC.

- ShAD puts too much trust in the industry to monitor and regulate itself as well as the effectiveness of a still untried and untested auditing system that the certification program depends upon. Other critical aspects of the process too require a “leap of faith” -- a prayer that previously disastrous practices will miraculously reverse their effects once the ShAD standards are released.
- The ShAD standards continue to perpetuate unsustainable and destructive open-throughput systems of aquaculture -- with a legacy of 400,000 hectares (and counting) of abandoned ponds in producer-nations. Further, the ShAD standards still rely on bad practices relating to so-called “mitigation of the effects of mangrove loss”.
- The process conveniently ignores wide-spread community displacement, human rights violations and environmental damage to many thousands of hectares of land by the shrimp industry prior to 1999. Under the present standards, ponds in these regions could be certified. Trends indicate that they will. The ASC becomes, therefore, a confessional for the shrimp industry and will grant indulgences in the form of certification.
- Export-oriented tropical shrimp production does not contribute towards food security. Food security should not be measured by the weight of export-production or the profit-curve of the industry, but instead by the availability of healthy and sustainable means of local food production for local consumption.
- There remains the great risk that ShAD certification, by placing a green stamp on tropical shrimp, will actually expand the demand for farmed tropical shrimp both certified and uncertified, thus promoting the continued (and possibly more rapid) expansion of unsustainable practices.

Feed issues are still not satisfactorily resolved and there is still no effective plan to meet increasing feed demands. The projected reliance on GM soy and palm oil is of great concern.

1. The COs had requested a breakdown of development time spent by ShAD in developing their social, environment and technical standards. We have not received this, yet.
1. ShAD/GSC and their offspring in the ASC have still not taken any direct and effective actions to influence consumers in the importing nations to reduce shrimp consumption -- extremely pertinent to the intent and purposes to any attempt at designing a certification program for shrimp.

We reiterate our demands that shrimp farming should not be located within the inter-

tidal zone; it should not be allowed to affect productive agricultural lands, or displace members of local communities.

The final draft standards represent an extremely crude attempt at setting up *standards*. The process demonstrates a lack of careful thought and consideration of ground realities and concern for Local Resource Users -- people who will suffer the consequences of WWF-ShAD's actions. The GSC's position that the standards will be released regardless of their merit and consequences leaves little scope for further dialogue.

As such, we the undersigned Conscientious Objectors reject the WWF-ShAD process and its shrimp aquaculture standards.

We reaffirm our support, as always,
For the mangroves and mangrove communities,
(Signed)

The Conscientious Objectors

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Khushi Kabir, Nijera Kori, Bangladesh
Riza Damanik, KIARA, Indonesia
Alfredo Quarto, Mangrove Action Project, USA
Maurizio Farhan Ferrari, Forest Peoples Programme, UK
Natasha Ahmad, ASIA Solidarity against Industrial Aquaculture, India
Gudrun Hubendick, Stockholm, Sweden

Don Staniford, Global Alliance against Industrial Aquaculture (GAAIA)
Maria Delgado, ECOTERRA Intl.
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Marieke Mutsaers, Director Trichilia ABC, The Netherlands
Stanislav Lhota, Univ. of South Bohemia & Usti nad Labem Zoo, Czech Republic
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Diane Wilson, Fisherwoman and Author, USA
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Jorge Varela, CODDEFFAGOLF, Honduras
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The Conservation Land Trust,
Conservacion Patagonica,
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Kristine and Douglas Tompkins
Juan Manuel Guevara, Ecuador

Bijaya Kumar Kabi, Director, Action for Protection of Wild Animals (APOWA), Orissa,
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Hasan Mehedi, Chief Executive, Humanitywatch, Bangladesh

Rowland Benjamin, President, Information for Action, Perth, Western Australia

Anti-Debt Coalition (KAU), Indonesia

Black Tiger Shrimp Farmers' Union (P3UW), Indonesia

Institute of Global Justice (IGJ), Indonesia

Berry Nahdian Furqon, Indonesia

Ruddy Gustave, KONPHALINDO, Indonesia

Akie Hart, Mangrove Forest Conservation Society of Nigeria

Tekena Opukunachukwu, Grassroots Coalition for Transparency and Good
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Nemi Tammuno, Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment

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