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## Certification of shrimp farming endangers mangroves

Certification has become a perverse tool in the hands of big corporations that are using it like a “green seal” to impose intrinsically damaging systems of production that become a menace to valued ecosystems. This is happening now to a highly biodiverse ecosystem like mangroves.

Several NGOs working with local communities in the shrimp producer-nations and consumers in the shrimp-importing nations have rung the alarm bell regarding the draft standards and the whole fault-ridden WWF-ShAD (Shrimp Aquaculture Dialogue) process.

Having participated themselves in one of the so-called “shrimp aquaculture dialogues,” these opposing NGOs have verified a worse case scenario whereby a predetermined end product - certification standards for farmed shrimp - is overriding any fair and inclusive stakeholder or resource user involvement in that process. Instead, the majority of those attending these “dialogues” were shrimp industry representatives, and local resource users. The vast majority of those affected by shrimp farming were noticeably absent from the entire three year process. This lack of local community input into the “dialogue” brings the whole effort to certify farmed shrimp into serious contention, especially contradicting WWF’s stated claims that its standards represent the affected local communities.

Mangrove Action Project, along with other Conscientious Objectors to the whole flawed “aquaculture dialogue” process have tried unsuccessfully to convince WWF and its allies to not release its standards under the banner of “social and environmental standards,” as this is just not fairly representative of their mainly technical standards which at most might be labelled Best Management Practices (BMPs) only.

However, one of the big arguments we have with WWF, in addition to our contention that there is no local community input to the standards, is that WWF has not tried to directly alert its wide membership and the public in general to avoid the unsustainable cheap consumption of shrimp. If consumers of farmed shrimp would simply reduce their demand for the product, there would be an immediate reduction in the expansion of the industry, and consequently a reduction in the damage done by these resource hungry shrimp farms, thus greatly lessening the adverse effects of this ever expanding industry that encroaches upon new and unspoilt grounds.

Furthermore, industrial shrimp farming is largely an unsustainable and destructive process that should not be condoned by any existing standards as “more sustainable.” The industry that WWF hopes to certify is mainly an open, throughput system of aquaculture that actually degrades the very ecosystems and resources needed to support it in the first place.

In the last 30 years, the rapid and largely uncontrolled expansion of the shrimp aquaculture industry has led to immense environmental and social problems, which have only recently been brought to light. Among the most serious problems is the degradation and loss of natural coastal resources. Unsolved pollution problems still plague the industry, despoiling once fecund waters of nearby estuaries and inshore coastal bays. Formerly rich fishing grounds are being impacted, and vital fish

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breeding and nursery habitat are being lost to the encroaching shrimp farms.

The overall setup processes and operations of industrial shrimp aquaculture are tremendously disruptive to the delicate and complex balance of coastal ecology. Vast stretches of invaluable mangrove forests are cleared to make way for shrimp ponds. Shrimp farms replace diverse, multiple resource environments with large-scale mono-culture operations. Worldwide, over a million hectares of valuable mangrove forests have been destroyed by shrimp farming alone--and this in only the last two- three decades!

Other important coastal habitats, such as mud flats, sea grass beds, and coral reefs have been degraded or ruined. Also, once productive farmlands have been left fallow, and important waterways and underground aquifers have been dangerously contaminated. .

Industrial shrimp aquaculture first destroys the local means of livelihood and ruins longstanding jobs by removal of the mangroves and salinization of the lands where traditional livelihoods such as farming and fishing are no longer viable options for most.

This \$40-\$60 billion megalith is itself fed by the gross appetite of unwary consumers in the North that the same industry so cleverly created with its successful promotion of cheap imported shrimp. Industry proponents assume there is no other way but forward with shrimp production in the South because there are no longer other options, while they also assume there is no better way to feed the North's growing appetite for seafood than via shrimp imports from the South. Certification turns into a profitable permit for industrial shrimp farming companies, which find a way of "greenwashing" their image and even find a new market for concerned consumers in the North.

In an Open Letter addressed to the committee members of the WWF-led Aquaculture Dialogues (1), activists from more than 40 organizations around the world denounce the intention of the ShAD General Steering Committee (ShAD/GSC) and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council's (ASC) to establish standards for shrimp aquaculture certification which will mean the perpetuation of "unsustainable and destructive open-throughput systems of aquaculture -- with a legacy of 400,000 hectares (and counting) of abandoned ponds in producer-nations".

The Conscientious Objectors say that ShAD "puts too much trust in the industry to monitor and regulate itself. The certification programme depends upon an untried and untested auditing system. Other critical aspects of the process too require a "leap of faith" -- that previously disastrous practices will miraculously reverse their effects once the ShAD standards are released."

The open letter, which will be circulating for signatures for 2 months, reflects the determination of the activists that "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".

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(1) <http://mangroveactionproject.org/news/action-alerts/shrimp-aquaculture-dialogue-standards-create-concern-your-comments-are-needed>

