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**CERTIFYING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES
IN THE MARINE AQUARIUM INDUSTRY**

By

The Marine Aquarium Council

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THE MARINE AQUARIUM COUNCIL:

CERTIFYING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE MARINE AQUARIUM INDUSTRY

What is the Marine Aquarium Council?

The Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) is a non-profit organization composed of representatives of the aquarium industry, hobbyists, conservation organizations, government agencies, and public aquariums - all with a shared interest in the future of the marine aquarium industry, the marine organisms it is based on, and the habitat that supports them.

The goal of MAC is ensuring a sustainable future for the marine aquarium industry, organisms and habitat through market incentives that encourage and support sustainable practices.

MAC will accomplish this by establishing standards for "best practices", developing an independent system to certify compliance with these standards, and creating consumer demand and confidence for MAC certified organisms, practices and industry participants.

Participation in the Marine Aquarium Council continues to be open to those ready to collaborate and contribute to a constructive dialogue and the development of market incentives and a certification system to achieve the MAC goal.

Where did MAC come from?

A cross section of organizations representing the aquarium industry, conservation organizations, public aquariums, hobbyists and scientists began meeting in 1996 in response to shared interest in:

- addressing concerns about the effects of destructive fishing and poor handling practices on coral reef fish and habitat;
- developing a market for marine aquarium organisms supplied through certified sustainable practices based on consumer demand and added value for certified organisms;
- maintaining livelihoods and income generation of rural aquarium fishermen through a sustainable marine aquarium industry; and
- increasing marine conservation awareness and action within the industry and among marine aquarium hobbyists and the general public.

Out of these meetings, the foundations for the Marine Aquarium Council emerged (initially called the Marine Aquarium Fish Council). From this broad coalition, an Interim Board was created to provide for more consistent, focused action toward realizing the MAC goals. The Board formed a series of technical committees to begin work on issues such as standards, monitoring, and education; hired an Executive Director as of June 1 1998; and has incorporated MAC as a non-profit organization.

The Board is currently composed of representatives of: American Marinelife Dealers Association, American Zoo and Aquarium Association, International Marinelife Alliance-Philippines, Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association, Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, Philippine Tropical Fish Exporters Association, Quality Marine Inc, The Nature Conservancy, and World Wildlife Fund.

How does MAC operate?

The importance of what MAC is working to achieve, its innovative basis in market mechanisms, and the broad base of participation has led to the active interest and initial support of a few funding organizations for the initial development of the certification system in pilot areas. In Hawaii, an initial prototype set of collecting and handling guidelines has been developed through a series of multi-stakeholder workshops and similar efforts will soon be underway in the Philippines and a South Pacific pilot area to be identified. MAC will continue a phased process of multi-stakeholder consultations to finalize the initial standards, test them in collection-to-retailer operations in pilot areas, and launch the certification/labeling system in 1999.

It is envisaged that the MAC organization and process, when fully established and mature, will evolve into a largely self-financed system based on the improved economic return from certified marine aquarium organisms. In the meantime, external funds continue to be sought for the initial stages of establishing MAC, e.g. to support the development and testing of the certification system, to train fishermen in sustainable collecting and handling methods, and to conduct awareness raising among the consumers and industry.

What does MAC mean to stakeholders in the marine aquarium industry?

The Marine Aquarium Council offers the opportunity to:

- Participate in developing and implementing a certification and labeling system;
- Exercise greater control and management over the animals and habitat upon which the industry is based;
- Provide a quality-controlled, value-added product to the consumer;
- Benefit from a program to create consumer interest in, demand for, and recognition of organisms supplied through MAC certified sustainable practices; and
- Be a part of a forum for the industry and its partners to address the opportunities, future and growth of a sustainable industry.

How do you find out more about MAC?

The Marine Aquarium Council is committed to achieving its goal of a market-based system in support of a sustainable marine aquarium industry. We are well on our way towards realizing this goal through the rapidly growing interest and involvement of industry and a wide range of partners.

MAC welcomes your comments, input and, especially, your involvement.

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