Second, on business development, it appears that, regardless of the political system in an individual country, the responsibility of developing the industry must reside with the industry itself and its supporting investors. Only the industry will have the necessary know-how with regard to production, marketing and distribution to launch an effective development of the industry. However, the industry must be given a proper framework within which to function responsibly.

Third, there is an obvious need for the establishment of a proper regulatory framework for this industry at the outset of its development to avoid large future costs. The regulatory framework must be based on water utilisation plans and coastal zone management plans, taking other industries competing for the same resources into consideration. International organisations and funding agencies could take on some of this responsibility, both through technical assistance and funding.

Fourth, there is scope for proper marketing and “green” labels. If the initial concerns of grouper culture are adequately dealt with, this industry could replace — at least partly — the current destructive wild catch of groupers that is largely based on poison fishing. And hence, the industry could position itself with selling a “green(er)” product. Currently, the market values wild-caught groupers higher than cultured groupers, although blind tests do not confirm these preferences. Marketing of cultured groupers as “green” adds to awareness of the cyanide problem and this would both help the consumer and the coral reefs.

Regional workshop on sustainable seafarming and grouper aquaculture

This workshop was held in Medan, Indonesia, 18–20 April, 2000, and was organised by the Government of Indonesia, the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP/FAO), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Network of Aquaculture Centres in the Asia-Pacific (NACA). The focus of the meeting was on grouper aquaculture and the management strategies necessary to support the sustainable development of seafarming in the Asian region.

There is a lot of interest in grouper culture throughout the region for income-generation and for livelihood improvement, and also as a means of reducing fishing pressure on wild grouper populations and an alternative source to cyanide-caught fish. Moreover, cultured fishes offer a means of reducing the risk of ciguatera food poisoning. Such promise of grouper culture can only be fulfilled, however, if it is operated sustainably and with human food safety in mind, as well as being based on practices that are widely accessible to coastal communities.

A major emphasis of the workshop was on technology transfer and management strategies for the benefit of farmers and coastal people. In relation to grouper aquaculture, presentations ranged from overviews and country status reports on grouper aquaculture in the region, to difficulties in the transfer to grouper hatchery technology to farmers in coastal communities, and the often-discussed problems of disease and health management and the continuing problem of feed management practices. Interesting perspectives on seed supply from the capture of settlement-stage larvae in Solomon Islands and on the possible future direction of grouper farming in the region were given.

In the latter presentation, serious problems of marketing were discussed, including the wide variability in prices over time and the possible impact on prices of becoming too successful in mariculture! The limits of seed supply based on wild-capture were discussed as a major constraint on culture development. Updates on the regional markets for grouper and marine fishes were given as were the use of mariculture as an alternative livelihood to destructive fishing practices in a marine park in Indonesia, and its role in community development in the Philippines. The talks were interesting and the debate and discussion lively with a real concern to develop grouper culture along sustainable lines.

The workshop concluded by establishing working groups to discuss coastal livelihoods and socio-economic issues, markets and certification issues and technology and management.

The report of the workshop will be available soon, and may be obtained by contacting: <yangsim@fisheries.go.th>.

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