

Welcome Remarks
by
H.E. Ambassador Apichart Chinwanno
At the International Press Conference on
“Progress in Sustainability Issues in Shrimp and Fish Culture”
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Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to all of you to this International Press Conference on “Progress in Sustainability Issues in Shrimp and Fish Culture”, jointly organized by the Fisheries Department of Thailand and the ASEM Aquaculture Platform.

In this I would like to thank in particular Prof. Dr. Patrick Sorgeloos, Chairman of the ASEM Aquaculture Platform. As one of very few recipients of the prestigious Honorary Life Membership of the European Aquaculture Society, Patrick needs no introduction. He is said to be the world’s most travelled aquaculture expert. And we are very proud to count on him as a true Friend of Thailand, who has been personally active in promoting sustainable aquaculture in Thailand for many years.

Aquaculture is the fastest growing food production sector and now supplies almost half of the global fish consumption. The FAO reports that to keep up with the pressure of population growth, the world will need to significantly increase its seafood production, and this is only possible through farming. But over-farming could take drastic tolls on the environment, exacerbated with the excessive use of pesticides, fertilizers and hormones which has become easily accessible to farmers.

Thus the key word here is “sustainable aquaculture” which will be the focus of this international press conference today, with Thailand as a showcase. I am certain you will appreciate our efforts to develop aquaculture production and productivity to maximize impacts on poverty and hunger reduction without compromising the environment.

Thailand and Southeast Asia have long tradition of farming fish and shrimp. Salt water and fresh water aquaculture initially aimed to serve the local population, and thus contributing to ancient customs and traditional cuisines.

But today aquaculture in Thailand has been developing fast to keep up with ever increasing domestic and international demands. Since 1993, Thailand has consistently been the global leader in fish and sea food exports. Salt water aquaculture alone has created around 700,000 jobs, not to mention the numerous supporting industries like cold storage, processing, and feed production. The significance of aquaculture to local economy and livelihood is obvious.

The question now is whether the Thai aquaculture is operating above the maximum sustainability yields.

The answer is yes and no.

I have to admit that we have also learnt our lessons the hard way, and we are now sparing no effort in making good on our past mistakes. Damaged mangrove areas have been recovered, and restoration continues at the community level. Fisheries that have been over exploited are now better regulated and quality control mechanisms in place.

The shrimp industry is clearly illustrative on this point. In a decade, Thailand's shrimp outputs grew from 300,000 tons to over 600,000 tons in 2010. The open secret to such surge is the development and implementation of sustainable technologies to ensure efficient production and thus lower production cost. Actually, this secret is also reflected in the development of Thailand's whole food chain, which has entailed its nickname as "Kitchen to the World".

One concrete example is the inclusion rates of fish meal in aquatic farming. Access to fish meal, a key aquaculture feed ingredient, is declining because of diminishing catches, competing demands and rapidly escalating prices. Thailand has taken a lead in reducing fish meal inclusion levels so that today we produce twice the volume of shrimp with the same quantity of fish meal.

Thailand also is a leader in recycling, as more and more of its fish meal requirements come from processing by-products of its surimi and tuna factories.

Before ending my welcoming remarks, I feel obliged to say that going for efficient food production and lower cost does not necessary mean a compromise in food safety. Our seafood processing industry has created a food safety record second to none, with modern and fully certified processing plants.

Admittedly, however, shock does emerge now and then. I would be remiss if I ignore the fact that today Thai and Southeast Asian shrimp farmers face a disease crisis that is affecting world supply and prices. We are working hard to solve this problem, particularly with the use of science and technology. Today we have already determined that the problem is not viral. It appears to be infectious and caused by bacteria, and the solution will be in better management of our pond systems. The latest good news is that there is some progress in improving shrimp survival rate.

As you can see, our journey to sustainability continues.

Thank you.
