

Live Reef Fish Trade in the Pacific Islands



Synopsis of the issue

Trade in live reef fish represents an important commodity in Asia and the Pacific and includes four distinct types of organisms within the trade stream:

- fish caught, shipped, and presented **live** to the consumer (the live reef **food** fish trade)
- ornamental fish caught for the hobby industry
- corals sold to the hobby industry (although corals are not fish, they are often included in the calculations of live reef trade)
- live rock, a hard substrate with colorful algae or coral growth

A recent global assessment of some 200 fisheries around the world concluded that the live reef fisheries of the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia are among the most threatened on the planet. This is due in large part to the growing and lucrative demand for live fish and the use of cyanide to capture these fish. An estimated 50-60% of the aquarium fish imported into the U.S. from the Philippines and 90% of the fish from Indonesia, are captured with cyanide.

The United States is the largest importer of coral reef species for food, jewelry and aquariums. The US accounts for approximately 60% of the world demand for live reef **ornamental** products, about 70%-90% of the live coral, and 95% of the live rock (rock with coralline algae growing on it). The trade is estimated to be increasing between 10% and 20% per year. The species exported from the Pacific for marine aquariums include more than 150 types of reef fish, such as butterfly fish, anemone fish, angelfish, and wrasse and over 60 species of live coral.

The live reef **food** fish trade primarily targets grouper species for the markets of Hong Kong and southern China. Southeast Asia and Australia are the major suppliers of this trade; yet, operators are increasingly seeking fish in more remote parts of the Western Pacific including Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. According to a report by TRAFFIC East Asia and WWF Hong Kong, the total annual value of live reef food fish imported into Hong Kong is estimated to be over US \$400 million.

Both live food fish and ornamental trade can have negative environmental impacts as a result of poor collection practices. For example, it is common to use cyanide to stun the fish. Although the cyanide may not kill the fish, it can kill the surrounding organisms and coral reef. Species such as Giant grouper and Humphead wrasse are particularly susceptible to overfishing because of their slow growth and long development to sexual maturity. Due to overfishing, Humphead wrasse is now listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and must now be strictly regulated by importing and exporting countries.

Because of the commercial value of this industry, there is strong motivation to identify sustainable practices. The Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) works to provide the hobbyist with a product that is certified as environmentally sound and sustainable. In addition, the International Marinelife Alliance (IMA), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and MAC are working with the Hong Kong Chamber of Seafood Merchants to develop standards for the live reef food fish trade. The Hong Kong Seafood Merchants represents 90 percent of the buyers of live reef food fish in Hong Kong and can have a substantial impact on collection practices.

Source: from International Marinelife Alliance and TRAFFIC/WWF

Live Reef Fish Trade Experts

Name	Organization	Country
Cristina Balboa	World Resources Institute	USA
Chip Barber	International Marinelife Alliance	USA
Barbara Best	US Agency for International Development	USA
Chip Boyle	Cook Islands Aquarium Fish Ltd.	Cook Islands
Patrick Chan	Hong Kong Chamber of Seafood Merchants	Hong Kong
Paul Holthus	Marine Aquarium Council	USA
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Nelson Kile	National Legislature	Solomon Islands
Rezal Kusumaatmadja	Marine Aquarium Council	USA/Indonesia
Michelle Lam	Marine Aquarium Council (MAC)	Solomon Islands
Paul Lokani	The Nature Conservancy (TNC)	PNG
Fraser MacIvray	International Marinelife Alliance	Hong Kong
Bryan McCullough	International Marinelife Alliance	Philippines
Tim Pickering	University of the South Pacific	Fiji
Yvonne Sadovy	University of Hong Kong	China

Selected Links and Publications

International Marinelife Alliance

<http://www.marine.org>

Live Reef Fish Information Bulletin. <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/News/lrf/lrf.htm>

Live reef food fish opinion poll. Opinion survey of public and seafood merchant attitudes toward live reef food fish trade in Hong Kong. To obtain the full report contact Noel Chan at NCHAN@wwf.org.hk

The Marine Aquarium Council.

<http://www.aquariumcouncil.org>

Online Fish ID Guide

http://www.wwf.org.hk/eng/conservation/wl_trade/reef_fish/online_guide/index.html

A comprehensive checklist for species found in the Asia-Pacific live seafood market.

Report of "The Hong Kong Trade in Live Reef Fish for Food" by TRAFFIC and WWF, 1999.

<http://www.traffic.org/reef-fish/>

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Live Fish Trade Initiative

<http://www.spc.org.nc/coastfish/News/LRF/9/LRF9-07-Initiative.htm>