



CERTIFYING “ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE SEAFOOD”

*Summary of an investigative report
on ASC-certified shrimp farms in Honduras*



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1. Background -- Shrimp cultivation and the ASC

Giant shrimp, or Scampi, as they are called in Sweden, were first seen in Swedish stores in the early 1990s. The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation's (SSNC) partners in Asia and Latin America brought our attention to devastation caused by export-oriented tropical shrimp farming — people lose their means of sustenance in the devastated mangrove forests; they lose the protection of mangroves against storms and tsunamis; local fish stocks and biodiversity is depleted; jobs are lost; the local economy becomes one-dimensional, dependent upon shrimp production for export. Numerous academic studies and news reports over the previous thirty years show that in addition to and as a consequence of environmental and economic losses, the industry precipitates conflicts¹ between local populations and shrimp farmers. The production-side of the shrimp value chain continues to violate human rights and labour laws.² A shrimp farm is generally established in the intertidal zone — salt-flats, mud flats, mangrove forests, lagoons, marshes and other wetlands — a rich, complex ecosystem that serves many ecological, social and economic functions.³ It has great biological diversity and is the breeding ground for a large variety of fish, crustaceans and other organisms. It also absorbs large amounts of carbon dioxide⁴. Close to half of the global mangrove forests have disappeared, mainly due to the shrimp farms.

The farming of tropical shrimp as a source of cheap protein is not economically or environmentally sustainable. This has proven many times over in many different ways. The UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is one of many studies that underline this simple fact⁵.

SSNC has brought the issue to attention since the early 1990's. Around 2011, it carried out a campaign against the sale of giant shrimp⁶. As a result most supermarkets stopped selling farmed shrimp. WWF Sweden Seafood Guide also warned at that time that farmed tropical shrimp was a bad environmental choice. The shrimp industry responded by creating various certification labels in order to legitimize the farming and sale of giant shrimp. SSNC studied some of these certification programmes and concluded that the production of shrimp in tropical areas is too detrimental to the environment to be possible to certify. Certification legitimizes the product and risks increasing the consumption⁷. The Swedish organic label KRAV early on decided that giant shrimp is not a product that should get certifications. In spite of this, WWF in the USA in 2004 initiated a dialogue with the fish- and shrimp industry, with finance by industry itself, in order to establish criteria for what they called environmentally and socially "responsible tropical shrimp farming". The Working Group on Tropical Shrimp⁸ and especially organisations in producing countries, followed the process from the start and presented detailed criticism against the proposals for certification. The group called itself

¹Peter Vandergeest. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2006.12.002>

²<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jan/23/thai-seafood-industry-report-trafficking-rights-abuses>

³<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/317/5834/41.2>

⁴In Swedish <https://www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/nyheter/mangrove-skyddar-och-forsorjer>

⁵ See below

⁶ <https://www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/skippa-scampi-certifierad-eller-inte>
short video in English <https://vimeo.com/28057861>

⁷

In English https://www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/sites/default/files/dokument-media/murky_waters.pdf

⁸The Tropical Shrimp Group is a working group within the Stockholm chapter of SSNC and part of SSNC Sea Network

the Critical Outsiders' Alliance⁹(CO). Hundreds of environmental organisations, mainly from the South, wrote protest letters against the certification¹⁰.



Critical Outsider Alliance, Press Release, 2012

Protests were held outside the buildings where the dialogue meetings were held. Certification was legitimizing an industry that destroyed the environment; the certification process was corruptible by design. But Aquaculture Stewardship Council, ASC, was created in 2010 in the Netherlands by WWF and IDH (Sustainable Trade Initiative) to certify “responsible aquaculture”. ASC completed the criteria for shrimp farming and the first shrimp farms were certified in Vietnam in 2014. This is a country where there are no independent environment organisations or a free press which can critically review what is happening.

In 2015 ASC-certified shrimp were introduced in Sweden and were given a green light in the WWF Sweden Seafood Guide. So now you can again find giant shrimp (with the ASC seal) in the supermarkets, like at Hemköp and ICA and in the restaurant chain Sushi Yama¹¹.

The CO alliance has analysed the ASC Standard in great detail — Principles, Criteria, Indicators and the actual process of audit (www.scampi.nu) The auditor determines compliance to environmental and social criteria upon recommendations made by consultants in the B-EIA and p-SIA. However, the recommendations (in the B-EIA and p-SIA) are kept confidential by the auditor and the ASC. This is not acceptable. The ASC cannot claim to be transparent if these crucial documents are not available for verification.

⁹“Critical Outsiders” is named after those who were not invited to participate in the dialogue process.

¹⁰ Example of protest letters, link to scampi.nu. “Certifying destruction” – a study from Ecuador

¹¹Scandic was one of the first companies to take away the giant shrimp and still do not serve them.

The CO Alliance has also commissioned field-work in different countries—people have visited farms that are certified by the ASC as well as those being certified. Without exceptions, our work shows that ASC-certified shrimp farms are neither environmentally sustainable, nor socially "responsible".¹²

The Tropical Shrimp group in the Stockholm chapter of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation gave biologist Jorge Varela Marquez the assignment to investigate how the certification process was carried out in ASC-certified shrimp farms in Honduras, and if this has led to any improvements of the environmental and social conditions. The report "Aquaculture and ASC Seal" was finished in May 2019. This document is a summary of the original report. The summary was written by Per-Ulf Nilsson, Gudrun Hubendick, Amit Thavaraj and Jocke Nyberg.

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A note from the Secretary General of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, SSNC

The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) has for a long time advised against Swedish import, marketing and consumption of tropical shrimp – certified or not. The reasons are the negative environmental and social impacts related to the industry, which SSNC has documented and stressed in previous reports. The presented report by a group of concerned SSNC members, Räkgruppen, adds further important information about the harsh reality facing coastal communities adjacent to the shrimp farms, as well as the continued loss of biodiversity. It also puts into question the ASC certification as a guarantee for responsible production, and the alleged positive effects on social and environmental sustainability.

Karin Lexén

29 August 2019

¹²We use the ASC's definition of "responsible"

2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the environmental and social performance of the shrimp farms operated by the Granjas Marinas San Bernardo Group (GGM); "Crimasa", "Cadelpa", "AQH", and "Las Arenas" shrimp farms in the Fonseca Gulf in Honduras.

The intention was to critically analyse how an ASC certification is carried out in Honduras and the extent to which certification has affected the social and environmental performance of the farms

The intention was further to contribute to a critical discussion about ASC at an international level and to present independent, verifiable field-data to importers, stores and consumers. The study was carried out by the biologist Jorge Varela Márquez, in cooperation with the consultancy firm Ambiente Desarrollo y Capacitación in Honduras. Jorge Varela Márquez has, for more than 30 years, worked with issues concerning mangroves, fisheries, aquaculture, biodiversity and the environment in general in his home country Honduras. In 1999 he was awarded the Goldman Environment Prize¹³ for his commitment to safeguard wetlands and his constructive criticism of the establishment of industrial shrimp farms in the Fonseca gulf.

Jorge Varela Marquez is aware that he has put his life in danger by publishing the results of his study in Honduras.

3. Methods and implementation

The study was carried out in line with established scientific methodology. Documents and sources studied were, inter alia, earlier studies, reports, laws and court cases, organisational protocols, the ASC Shrimp Standard used (v1.0 March 2014) as well as all the audit reports. Interviews were carried out on site, individually and in groups, with social leaders, small-scale farmers, fisher folk and others living in villages adjacent to the shrimp farms.

Varela, together with Ambiente, Desarrollo y Capacitación, visited six villages and carried out 8 village meetings. 144 people attended these meetings.

Observatorio Ecumenico Internacional de Derechos Humanos, participated in one of the visits and verified the information and complaints presented by the inhabitants and verified the conclusions of the study.

¹³<https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/jorge-varela/>

4. Conclusions

- The shrimp farms operated by the company all have very poor environmental and very poor social performance. They are not sustainable; they are not environmentally and socially responsible; they have already damaged the ecosystem in the region prior to certification and continue to do so after certification.
- These shrimp farms are not compliant with multiple environmental and social criteria in the ASC's Shrimp Standard but they were certified nevertheless.
- On some environmental and social criteria —location and expansion, effluent discharge, water usage, conflict resolution, rights of indigenous resource users and labour rights — the farms are clearly in violation of national and international law as well as the ASC Shrimp Standard but they have procured documentation to show that they are compliant. This documentation is accepted at face-value by the auditors who do not have the time or inclination to verify their provenance.
- Social and environmental impact assessment reports are conducted perfunctorily — the time allocated for public hearings with the local community and environmental impact assessments was clearly not enough to collect the information contained in the reports. In one instance, it is unclear if the consultants could have travelled from one location to another in the time they claim, let alone conduct a proper meeting.
- The background documentation for the Biodiversity and Environmental Impact Assessment (B-EIA) and the participatory Social Impact Assessment (p-SIA) includes inputs from an organization that claimed to be a representative of the local communities. However, many testimonies collected during the investigations (conducted *after* the B-EIA and p-SIA) revealed that the organization did not (and does not) represent the local community or its interests.
- GGM is a rich organization and wields considerable political influence. People in the local community live in constant fear of reprisals from GGM and its hired "security" personnel.
- Finally, it is concluded that, after studies of Indonesia and Bangladesh, the ASC's recommended audit process has been shown to be flawed in Honduras as well. It turns a blind eye to graft and incorrect documentation.

5. Background — Shrimp farms in Honduras

In 1973 the US company Sea Farms de Honduras established itself in the Fonseca bay, a large Pacific Ocean sea bay bordering three countries —Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Under the name Grupo Granjas Marinas (GGM), the conglomerate was given a concession to establish shrimp farms. These concessions are contrary to Honduras' constitution, which, according to Paragraph 107, does not allow foreigners to own any land within 40 km of the coast. Eleven years later, in 1984, the company, in alliance with the Honduran oligarchy, expanded the shrimp farms. The company was given de facto ownership of large tracts of land, in particular wetlands in the shape of salt pans and winter lagoons. These are, depending on the tides and the seasons, at times inundated, at times dry, border areas between the mangrove forests, dry land and the sea. They are environmentally sensitive and important for a number of plants and animals, who have adjusted themselves to the unique environment where river water and sea water come together. The mangrove forests are also very important breeding grounds for various fish and other animals, and as erosion protection and protection against storms. The areas are further important for the local population, which has adapted to sustainably exploit the local resources, in the shape of fish, crustaceans, plants and wood products.

When the shrimp farms were established and later expanded, conflicts erupted between the local population and the interests of the company. The first, serious conflict occurred in 1984 when the inhabitants of El Jicarito protested against the establishment of farms in the salt flats/lagoons and adjacent farm land.

With financial support from USAID and the World Bank, and in cooperation with leading Honduran politicians, banks and large businesses, there was a successive expansion of the shrimp farms along the coast. A shrimp farming network was established – including GGM, the focus of this study.

The shrimp farms pushed out the local fishing communities and closed off their access to fishing waters and clam fishing in the mangrove, access to fire wood and other products from nature, as well as jobs, free movement and fishing in rivers and coastal areas. In 1988 people formed the Committee to Defend Flora and Fauna of the Fonseca Bay (CODDEFFAGOLF)¹⁴The organisation represents fishermen, small scale farmers and their families in the Choluteca province, adjacent to GGM farms. For many years people have protested against the farms both locally and nationally.

In 2001 inhabitants blocked a road in protest against new farms established without permit. A number of people were injured and jailed. In relation to the protests the company is responsible for several killings and cases of assault. The manager of GGM admitted to one of the killings in an interview with BBC in 2004. Nobody has been charged and tried. At that time GMSB promised that no further expansion would be made. In 2012 it was reported to the police that expansion was made in the area La Jagua. Also in 2012 a 12-year old boy was killed by company guards.

¹⁴Comité para la Defensa de la Flora y Fauna del Golfo de Fonseca. Hemsida: <http://coddeffagolf.org/>

CODDEFFAGOLF took the case of destroyed wetlands to a Central American Tribunal¹⁵. It declared that the company contravened the RAMSAR convention¹⁶ and also the World Bank was criticised for not having taken into regard the environmental aspects when they decided to support the shrimp farms.

A Honduran court fined the company US\$31 000 , and ordered the executive director Jacobo Paz, to report to the police. It is not clear if the fines were ever paid. In January 2014 Jacobo Paz was instead installed as Minister for agriculture, fishing and aquaculture in a new government. As minister he promoted a law, which was adopted, which regards the area of the shrimp farms as equal to private property – the Law to strengthen shrimp farming¹⁷. He also established a foundation for social and economic development – FUNDESUR¹⁸. The foundation is run by the shrimp farmers’ business association.

6. GGM shrimp farms are certified by ASC

GGM applied for ASC certification in 2015-16. The farms were certified. Our investigation demonstrates that the B-EIA and p-SIA¹⁹, two of the six principles (in the ASC Standard) to which compliance is evaluated were not conducted properly — the data-sets were too small, community inputs were too few and the conclusions do not follow logically from the data collected.

The assessment of the effects, which were presented in the B-EIA and p-SIA were based on two different meetings during a few hours, one with local authorities and organizations, the others with the local population in some of the neighbouring villages. Villagers who participated didn’t even know that the meetings were about the certification of the farms, but they did register their opinions about the social and environmental impacts of the farms. Also, few of the participants were actually small scale farmers or fisherfolk — our team could not verify if all participants said to be present at the meeting were, indeed, members of the local community

¹⁵ Tribunal Centroamericano del Agua, numera Tribunal Latinoamericano del Agua.

¹⁶ An international convention for the protection of particularly sensitive wetlands, important for bird life.

¹⁷ Source:

<http://www.poderjudicial.gob.hn/CEDIJ/Leyes/Documents/Ley%20de%20Fortalecimiento%20de%20la%20Camari cultura.pdf>

¹⁸ Fundación para el desarrollo de la zona Sur

¹⁹ B-EIA -Bio-diversity and Environmental Impact Assessment, P-SIA - Participatory Social Impact Assessment



Public protest outside a shrimp farm. (Illustration: Margareta Nilsson)

7. Local experiences before certification

Views of the local population presented to the consultants who prepared the B-EIA and the p-SIA .

- The felling of the mangrove forest negatively affects biodiversity and the local populations' access to food and other goods, like firewood and building material
- The access to remaining mangrove forests and lagoons is made difficult as shrimp farms cut off the water ways, protecting them with armed guards
- The company's armed guards chase away the local population around farms, where people are no longer allowed to fish. People's nets are destroyed by the guards
- The local population is falsely accused of stealing shrimp
- People are in many places not allowed to fish for mangrove crabs or other crustaceans or to fetch wood in the mangrove, even though this is public land and water
- It is increasingly difficult to reach areas where one can fish, as the shrimp farms have taken control over most of the coastal area
- Almost all areas that are inundated during the winter have been transformed into shrimp farms. In the GGM area there are no more winter lagoons²⁰
- Water that is pumped out from the farms is not treated. Waters around the farms are thus contaminated and fish and shell fish are damaged by chemicals like chlorine, chloro-hydrates, metabisulfite etc, in particular when the ponds are drained after harvest and remaining life in the enclosed ponds is killed chemically bodies.

²⁰ These lagoons are important resting areas for migrating birds from the North American continent.

- The water needs of the farms has resulted in less water reaching the lagoons and wetlands, which has shortened the fishing periods and diminished fish life and biodiversity
- The GGM shrimp farms expand, into nature reserves and wetlands with and without environmental permits. Most mammals in the mangrove have disappeared, as well as several mangrove species
- Birds inside the farms are hunted and killed

These views were presented to the consultants who prepared the B-EIA and p-SIA ; They nevertheless, reported that the effects on biodiversity and local communities are negligible and compatible with continued shrimp farming. The damages, their report said, would be repaired without any intervention. How is this logical? Clearly, the environmental and the socio-economic conditions in the region have deteriorated step by step since 1972, when the first GGM shrimp farm was established and continue to deteriorate at an accelerated pace. The consultants did not give any reasons to justify their recommendation.

This should, in itself, have been enough to deny ASC certification to GGM farms.

Among the demands for corrective measure raised by the local inhabitants were:

- That the water from the dams is purified before it is pumped out into the surroundings.
- That the local population is allowed to take advantage of fish and shellfish left behind after the shrimp harvests, rather than it being thrown away or killed chemically, causing damage to the mangrove and fish life, as well as causing skin problems for people.
- That a thorough investigation is made concerning thefts so that fishermen are not unduly accused of stealing from the farms.
- That the shrimp farm companies keep their promises. For example, the company Cadelpa was given permission to drill a well on community land and in return Cadelpa promised to install running water in community homes. The promise was never fulfilled and therefore the villagers want Cadelpa to stop using the community's water.
- That the shrimp farms employ local people instead of people from the outside.
- That the guards stay and watch within the farm limits and allow fishermen to carry out their work in the wetlands outside the farms limits, allowing them to pass by without being threatened and harassed.
- That a buffer zone be created between the farms and public spaces in order for the guards to keep within the farm properties and allow people to pass easily and freely.
- That military and police are not used as guards and that the guards are not masked and not armed with military weaponry.
- That the companies respect that fishing activity is determined by tidal intervals; some GGM guards, however, force the fishers to fish only during the day. This is unacceptable.
- That the companies respect the law and do not expand. They should rehabilitate the mangrove forests in the region, including areas of protected natural reserves, which the farms have destroyed.

8. What is legitimized by the certification

On the basis of the criticism presented by the local fishing population during the certification process and thereafter, this follow-up study was carried out²¹, involving a number of interviews with representatives from the surrounding villages. In conclusion, a number of negative observations caused by the shrimp farms were presented, all of which are legitimized by the certification:

- Worsened access to natural resources, caused by the control over natural habitats and obstructed access to the mangrove forests, the lagoons and tidal areas
- Threats against food sufficiency when access to food and energy raw material is impeded
- Continuous threats and harassment by the company guards in the mangrove forests, lagoons and tidal areas
- The drying up of wetlands, which through the government concessions are made into privately controlled areas. Many times this happens without the environment license that is needed
- Pollution and poisoning of wetlands when the chemically treated waters are pumped out
- Damages to the biodiversity as eco-systems are destroyed, threatening bird life, water- and land life
- Continued elimination of bird life as birds are shot within the shrimp farms
- Violation of human rights as an effect of the above causes, accusations about shrimp thefts and threats against the population when fishing in public adjacent waters.



Choluteca Honduras (Photo: Gudrun Hubendick)

²¹ The study at the Fonseca bay was carried out in February 2017, and in February and September 2018, by Jorge Varela Márques and assistants

9. GGM and the ASC have hidden these matters behind the veil of certification. Shrimp from these farms is now, suddenly, "responsibly farmed."ASC does not comply with its own policy

"The purpose of ASC is to improve the environment and the social situation connected to the shrimp farms"

Comment: This purpose is not reached. There are no proposals about how to improve social and environmental conditions. There are no recommendations on how environmental destruction should be avoided or reversed. Concerning the social effects, the issues raised by the local people are registered, but their importance is devalued. As a result, there are no proposals on how to accommodate the demands of the villagers. Our study shows that the situation has only been aggravated.

"ASC considers the care for bio-diversity is of utmost importance and a key to the preservation of a healthy eco-system."

Comment: No recommendation concerning the bio-diversity is presented. One is given the impression that the bio-diversity has not been affected at all, in spite of habitat losses, contamination of waters, effects on the lagoons and salt flats, "bird control" etc. Neither do the consultants analyse the flora around the shrimp farms. No specification of species is made and no questions are asked, as if the flora is not a part of the bio-diversity.

"The first list about environmental impacts was established during the meeting with the interest groups (the company and their interested partners) and was then "cleaned" in relation to their importance, in a process of discussion and choice, excluding those impacts that did not merit to be part in the phase of valuation and evaluation..."

Comment: Only GGM was presented with a list of impacts and given the opportunity to comment and suggest revisions. The local population was not invited into this process of discussions and selection, and less so in the removal or re-prioritization of local concerns (as presented by the consultants in the final report). Not sending the draft report to the organisations and the local people erodes any legitimacy of the process and should be sufficient reason not to certify. According to the consultants and GGM, all the social and environmental consequences were either "minimal" with low impact, or compatible. In each case they recommended that there was no need of corrective measures or control.

Deficiencies in the implementation of the B-EIA and p-SIA

A number of additional deficiencies are to be found in the B-EIA . They are, inter alia, supposed to evaluate wild life, diseases and the handling of exotic species. This was not done. Almost ironic is that GGM actively kills birds in the shrimp farms, while they have set aside a small area for "bird protection". The environmental analysis criticises the killings and demands that the birds should be chased away in some other way. Nothing has been done.

The ASC consultants views the non-governmental organisation FENAPESCAH as a representative of the local population. But it seems this organisation exists to support the shrimp farmers. It doesn't

have an office, any personnel, any equipment or local members, nor does it report any activity. In spite of this, it participated in the evaluation as local representative.

As mentioned earlier, the consultants omit from their conclusions a number of deficiencies, pointed out by the locals, concerning the environment, the bio-diversity and social effects, as the consultants view these as of lesser importance. GGM is only criticized on two accounts, concerning overtime payments and how wages are paid. These too are not considered important enough to deny certification.

The consultants ignore the long-term environmental destruction by not analysing the shifting hydrological and geographical conditions over the year in an extremely complex and fluid ecosystem. No “annual maps” are presented, which could have shown how the areas shift considerably between the seasons. For example, dry areas are inundated during the rainy season and then harbour a very diversified water- and bird life and constitute important areas for the local population’s livelihood. They are also globally important habitats for migrating birds.

That the farms have been established in nature reserves is ignored on the grounds that they were established before the area was declared a reserve²². But in many cases, it is unclear when the farms were established and in several cases the farms have been extended after the formation of the reserves. But the consultants conclude that the farms preceded the reserves and that they are operated in accordance with laws and regulations.

The consultants conclude that the shrimp farms have been established after a concession from the government, mainly on “a salt-flat with limited vegetation and mangroves in the outskirts”. Maps and pictures are all taken at one point in time in 2016. There is no presentation of pictures from different times of the year or from different years, for example satellite pictures, where one would have been able to compare changes. It is said that WWF made a multi-temporal study in 2016, but the consultants don’t present any such study.

In the consultants’ report, the mangrove is presented as a critical habitat. But there is no definition of different species and the consultants ignore the various social, economic and environmental services provided by the mangrove ecosystem. Neither is there any analysis of the ecosystem with its winter lagoons and salt-flats which, during the rainy season, transforms thousands of hectares into lakes with great bio-diversity, where thousands of families find their sustenance and where hundreds of thousands of birds live. Most of these salt-flats are now shrimp farms. This is not even mentioned in the studies, as they were already transformed into shrimp farms when the study was made. As a result, it is not mentioned that the farms have invaded a “RAMSAR 1999” area, designated as an essential wetland²³. The goal of the RAMSAR convention is the “preservation and sensible use of all wetlands through local and national measures and international cooperation, as a contribution to a globally sustainable development.”

²² *Sub Sistema de Areas Naturales Protegidas de la Zona Sur*

²³ The area “Sistema de Humedales de la Zona Sur de Honduras» is a complex of seven coastal areas encompassing 69 711 hectares along the Fonseca bay. Many species of mangrove are the main vegetation in this typical marine-coastal eco-system, affected by the tides. The tidal lagoons are, during the rainy season home to both migratory and stationary birds, as well as being breeding areas for species of turtles, mussels, crustaceans and fish. The area is important for the surrounding inhabitants, for traditional fishing and forest products.”

10. Who is responsible?

Who is responsible for this state of affairs in Honduras? The ASC, for creating a flawed certification process? IDH and WWF for funding and promoting it?

The ASC claims that their Standards are "best in class" without defining what that means. They are present at industry exhibitions peddling the market-benefits of their seal, while WWF actively promotes the consumption of ASC-certified shrimps in Sweden.

The question of responsibility has become one of assigning blame—the ASC conveniently shifts the blame to the auditors as was done in Bangladesh, in 2017. Auditors point to available documentation and claim that it is all they can check in the time at hand.

Nobody, it seems, wants to accept that these farms are neither responsibly farmed nor sustainable nor compliant with the standard to which they are certified.

Ultimately, it is consumers who should decide because it is to consumers that the ASC is accountable. However, it is difficult for the consumers to make an informed choice because they trust the WWF Fish Guide, which is widely distributed. Criticism of the ASC certification process, on the other hand, is restricted to reports such as this one.

If a Swedish consumer, conscientious and careful, decides to buy ASC certified shrimp it is because they believe that the ASC's claim to certify "responsible seafood" is justifiably true. This report demonstrates that the ASC's claim is not true.

11. Attachments

What is the ASC seal?

In 1994 World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in the USA initiated a dialogue with the industry, and financed a process to develop criteria for “responsibly” farmed tropical shrimp. The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) was formed in 2010 in the Netherlands by WWF and IDH (Sustainable Trade Initiative) to certify responsible aquaculture. ASC completed the criteria for shrimp farming and the first farms were certified in Vietnam in 2014.

ASC declares that the purpose of the certification is to push the aquaculture sector towards environmental and social responsibility within the industry. The shrimp industry there was an interest was interested in legitimacy — an approval of sorts from environmental organizations — in order to avoid criticism of the aquaculture’s detrimental effects on the environment and social and economic conditions of the local population.

These contradictory interests cannot be reconciled. SSNC and many other environmental organisations around the world are of the opinion that it is never possible to cultivate shrimp in sensitive intertidal ecosystem. The environmental and social consequences are too severe and, in many cases, irreversible. Economic calculations (fig.) show that there is always a loss to the country when shrimp is produced in open-throughput farms located in mangrove ecosystems, as the short-term economic gains are dwarfed by long-term costs. The gains, such as they are, are made by shrimp farming industries end up with a small group of businessmen in the shrimp export market, while the local population suffers great losses.

A considerable weakness with the ASC-certification is that it actually investigates a very limited part of the production chain. Production of shrimp feed is not reviewed; neither are hatcheries, juvenile procurement or processing plants all of which adversely affect the environment.

Shrimp feed consists mainly of small forage fish (from the family that includes anchovy). These are overfished. They are an important local source of food. The fish feed industry, essentially, grinds up fish to produce shrimp. In addition to animal protein, commercial shrimp food also uses GM soybean.

Antibiotics are used regularly, all the time, in hatcheries. They are also used, occasionally, in grow-out ponds. When the ASC claims that their shrimp is antibiotic free, they actually mean "We don't check hatcheries where antibiotics are used."

These facts are conveniently hidden by the certification companies like the ASC because their standards only certify activities and raw-materials used inside the grow-out ponds.

ASC also certifies shrimp farms established in nature preserves, as long as they have been established in accordance with local laws and regulations. As the laws often are written by interests close to the industry (as in the case of Honduras) the result is that shrimp farms may devastate environmentally sensitive areas and still get the ASC seal. The losers are not only coastal communities but also the country as a whole, which loses coastal protections, natural water purification systems, biodiversity, an efficient carbon sink, etc.

ASC declares that it wants to minimize negative social and economic consequences. But, as this study shows, such effects are of such low priority that they do not affect the success of a application for certification.

The ASC's priorities for its Shrimp Standard were clearly outlined in the document — the Standard would be drafted so that 20% of the shrimp industry could be certified without making any changes to their production systems.

UN Ecosystem Assessment

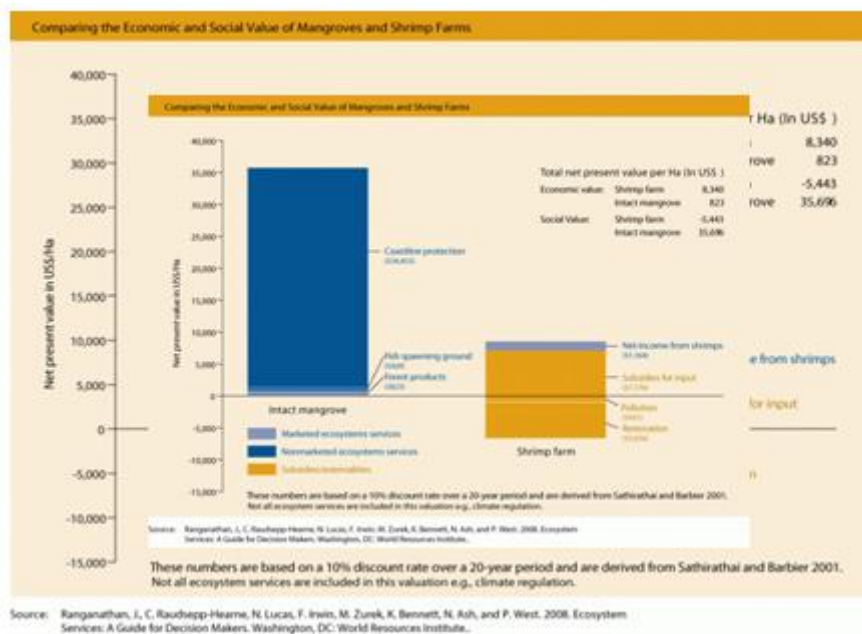


Figure 1: Relative cost-benefit of natural coastal ecosystems vs. aquaculture

Mangrove forest and tidal zones

