WWF

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Aquaculture

FARMED PANGASIUS

Advancing Responsibly Farmed Seafood

The farming of pangasius (also known as tra or basa catfish) is one of the fastest growing types of aquaculture in the world. The growth in pangasius aquaculture is driven, in large part, by the dramatically increased demand in the marketplace. Vietnam is the source of more than 90 percent of pangasius exports, which have expanded 50-fold over the last decade. Pangasius is sold to more than 130 countries globally, mainly in the form of white fillets. European Union countries dominate the export market, with a share of 25.3 per cent followed closely by the U.S. with 22.0% (by value, 2012).

Potential Environmental Impacts

With global fish consumption expected to exceed beef, pork, and chicken, it is imperative that farmed seafood is produced responsibly. Some consider Vietnamese pangasius farming to be the single most intensive high volume commercial food production system on the planet. While this produces real benefits for resource efficiency, it also has created environmental impacts, including:

- **Legal** – Some farms operate outside the legal framework for addressing environmental, social and food safety issues
- **Land use and water use** - As new farms are established, sensitive habitat can be destroyed and water often is diverted, which can affect other water users and the environment
- **Water pollution and waste management** - Excess waste can pollute the water and negatively affect plant and animal habitat
- **Genetics and biodiversity** – Escaped farmed pangasius may compete with wild fish and affect ecosystems, especially in areas where pangasius is not yet established
- **Feed management** - Use of fishmeal, fish oil and trash-fish as pangasius feed is resulting in depletion of food sources that other fish rely on.
- **Health management, veterinary medicines and chemicals** - Pangasius farms are prone to health problems that can impact farmed and wild stocks and inappropriate use of veterinary medicines and chemicals can negatively impact the environment and human health
- **Social responsibility/user conflicts** - Large numbers of workers are employed on pangasius farms and in processing plants, placing labor practices and worker rights under public scrutiny

The Solution

Pangasius in and of itself is not the issue, but rather whether it is responsibly produced. With wild fisheries fished largely to their maximum capacity, or even beyond, most additional demand for seafood from a growing and increasingly affluent population will need to come from farmed sources. The question is how can this growth occur sustainably? WWF sees great potential in working with this growing industry to raise seafood with minimal impact on people and natural ecosystems to satisfy a growing demand for seafood and at the same time taking pressure of wild fisheries.

Through a three-year initiative called the Pangasius Aquaculture Dialogue (PAD), which was coordinated by WWF, more than 600 people— including scientists, conservationists and pangasius farmers—created global standards designed to reduce the negative environmental and social impacts associated with pangasius farming. The PAD standards were finalized in August 2010 and turned over to the independent Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), the global organization that manages global standards for responsible aquaculture.

Better Choices in Farmed Seafood

To ensure that the progress towards sustainability keeps pace with the explosive growth in the farmed pangasius industry, WWF is working together with the Vietnamese government, Vietnam Fisheries Society (VINAFIS) and the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers (VASEP) to meet a national commitment to achieve 100 percent of farmed pangasius under one of the available certification schemes by 2015, with 50 per cent certified by the ASC. This robust commitment to ASC certification sets an ambitious target that has the potential to be a major sustainability boost for the global aquaculture industry.

WWF believes that the ASC is the most credible global aquaculture certification scheme to date because its standards are measurable, based on sound science, created by a broad and diverse group of stakeholders, developed through a transparent process, achievable, focused on measureable performance. As a result, the standards encourage innovation to reduce environmental impacts and help ensure positive change on the water.

WWF is working with 18 Vietnamese pangasius farms to help them comply with ASC standards. Once certified, these farms will collectively certify 9% of Vietnam's exports – helping meet Vietnam's commitment to pursue ASC certification.

Pangasius farmers who adopt the standards can earn the ASC label, certifying that their seafood was raised in an environmentally-friendly and socially-responsible way.

By committing to source farmed pangasius from only ASC-certified farms, restaurants and retailers can ensure that their consumers have the best environmental and social choice in farmed seafood. In the same way, by offering environmentally sound choices, they can help provide impactful and sustained improvements in the health of the world's oceans and rivers.

For more information

José Villalón
Vice President, Aquaculture
jose.villalon@wwfus.org
+1 202-495-4625

World Wildlife Fund
1250 24th St. NW
Washington, DC 20037