

International workshop on advances in sea cucumber aquaculture and management

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Last 14-18 October, the FAO Fisheries Department organized an international workshop on the "Advances in Sea Cucumber Aquaculture and Management" (ASCAM) in collaboration with the Chinese Ministry of Fisheries in the northern Chinese coastal city of Dalian, Liaoning Province. The intense fishing efforts on an increasing number of sea cucumber species, the constantly growing markets and the recent advances in farming technologies were the three main reasons behind the organization of this workshop. The Workshop was organized in three main sessions focusing on the status of resources and utilisation, on resource management, and on aquaculture advances. During the Workshop, 35 presentations were delivered by international experts from 20 countries including Australia, the People's Republic of China, Cuba, Egypt, Malaysia, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Tanzania and Viet Nam.

The opening paper was delivered by Prof Chantal Conand, a respected scientist in the field of holothurian research and editor of the "Beche-de-Mer Information Bulletin" from the University of La Réunion (see <http://www.spc.org.nc/coastfish/News/BDM/bdm.htm> under the Secretariat of the Pacific Community). Prof Conand's paper provided an overview on the present status of world sea cucumber resources and utilization focusing on traditional and commercial tropical and temperate fisheries in the western Pacific and Indian oceans. Subsequent presentations provided updated information on resources, fisheries, aquaculture and trade in some of those countries where sea cucumber play an important role in the rural economy of fishing communities. A comprehensive report on China was delivered by Prof Chen Jiabin, former director of the Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute in Qingdao (Shandong Province). His report was well received from the foreign experts, particularly as limited information on the past and current activities in China has been available in the international literature. Among the other countries, Cuba and Egypt reported the exploitation status of their sea cucumber resources for the first time.

In the resources management session, chaired by Dr Steve Purcell (WorldFish Center) and Dr Sven Uthicke (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Australia), 12 reports presented existing management and conservation plans, restocking and enhancement strategies and on-going research activities. The last session of the Workshop focused on recent advances in aquaculture farming technologies, with many of the speakers coming from Chinese research institutions and the private sector. This session was chaired by Drs Jean-François Hamel and Annie Mercier from Canada. Presentations dealt with hatchery and farming techniques covering diseases, nutrition and other important topics related to sea cucumber reproduction and farming.

The Workshop was an excellent opportunity to visit some of the commercial facilities in the area and a day-long field tour was organized to visit the hatcheries and on-growing sites of two important Chinese companies farming the Japanese sea cucumber (*Apostichopus japonicus*).

At the end of each session, the participants engaged themselves in group discussions in order to deliberate on major issues raised during the various presentations. All the comments made were carefully noted and provided the material for discussion during the last day of the Workshop, which was only attended by the session chairpersons and the FAO Fisheries Department officer (Mr A. Lovatelli). A list of recommendations was produced at the end of the activity that will hopefully serve international and regional development organizations and national governments in prioritizing their activities concerning sea cucumber conservation and exploitation.

The full papers, recommendations and the list of participants of the ASCAM Workshop will be published by the FAO Fisheries Department as a technical document and will be available in March 2004. For further information and follow-up activities, please contact Mr A. Lovatelli (alessandro.lovatelli@fao.org).