

**Report on Social Organization Participation at the
FAO Expert Workshop on Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification¹
Fortaleza, Brazil
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Background

The Workshop represented an initiative of the FAO COFI (Committee on Fisheries) Sub-committee on Aquaculture – created in 2001. The seminar counted on the participation of 52 people (see [ENACA](#) site for Workshop documents, Presentations, Participant list), and concerned an effective response to a recommendation made by COFI member countries during the 2nd Session of the Sub-committee on Aquaculture, carried out in Norway in 2003.

Workshops carried out in Thailand, and in August of this year (2007) in Brazil intend to offer orientations on Aquaculture Certification through the development of certification guidelines. The Brazil Workshop organized by FAO, NACA, and the Brazilian

¹ Translated by Elaine Corets, Latin American Coordinator, Mangrove Action Project, ecorets@gmail.com.

Government, in response to the recommendations of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (ASC) of COFI looked to tackle Latin American regional questions and also review the product generated from the Specialist Workshop in Bangkok. This workshop, carried out in Fortaleza, Ceara state, Brazil, constituted the second step in a series of meetings assisting the development of guidelines for aquaculture, with a strong emphasis on aquaculture products in the Americas.

The participation of social organizations

Brazilian social organizations, supported by funds from the Avina Foundation, met during a preparatory workshop in the town of Prainha do Canto Verde, municipality of Beberibe, Ceara state, with 12 participants representing Brazilian networks, NGOs, and community associations. During this event of a preliminary nature we shared with the participants the state of art of shrimp farming in Brazil and worldwide (Jeovah Meirelles) and certification in Brazil (Luciana Queiroz), followed by a directed discussion led by Soraya Vanini based on info supplied by Brian O’Riordan (ICSF), leading to a discussion on a strategy for participation in the FAO/NACA/SEAP event.

At the end of the preparatory workshop the participants came to a consensus on the general character of a letter to be distributed during the *FAO Expert Workshop on Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification* in Fortaleza, in the name of the Prainha do Canto Verde workshop participants. It is important to note that this letter came out of the event as a draft that would be submitted to other organizations in Brazil and around the world, through which it gained a more assertive character. As shellfish and crab collectors and fishfolk were considering carrying out a public act during the FAO event, many suggested alterations in order to make the letter more incisive². In any case, it is fundamental to emphasize that during the entire FAO event that the group presented itself disposed to dialog, without omitting to make explicit the limits of the certification process and of our intention of not permitting the recent history of degradation by the aquaculture industry to be legitimized through certification.

We considered the letters, resolutions³, and declarations^{4,5} on certification, as well as the FAO Workshop preliminary documents. With the support of Avina, we were able to get a translation of the guidelines to be discussed. The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the Rede MangueMar (Brazilian mangrove network) played a fundamental role in providing for an opening and participation of social organizations (NGOs, networks, associations, etc.) through dialogue with FAO and the Brazilian Government. Such initiatives provided advances in the sense of guaranteeing this participation, as well as a guarantee of translations during the plenary and group sessions.

Beyond the Brazilian participation represented by networking and articulation in the states of Ceara and Bahia, we counted on the presence of Juan Carlos Cardenas, representing ICSF. Juan Carlos led us, during the working group and plenary sessions, to the challenges of sustainability in the salmon farming industry in Chile.

² [Letter from Brazilian social organizations concerning aquaculture certification](#) (Ceara, 30 July 2007);

³ [Statement on Certification](#) (Bahía de Caráquez, 5 November 2003);

⁴ [Declaration of concern on shrimp aquaculture certification](#) (Bangkok, 25-27 September 2006);

⁵ [Rome declaration on shrimp farming](#) (Italy, 5-9 March 2007)

We were careful to always expound decisively on the limits of how certification has been adopted and practiced to this point, including during the talk by Soraya Vanini (ICSF), [‘Certification: an NGO Perspective’](#). During the presentation she made clear considerations on the limits of certification, on the trajectory of shrimp farming and of industrial aquaculture in Latin America, and on the limits of participation in these processes: not only on aspects of who participates, but on the nature of participation, emphasizing the absence of fishers, rural farmers, and other small producers and their families and communities.

During the presentation five aspects were highlighted:

1. *The sustainability of aquaculture* has a relationship with a necessary group of coordinated initiatives related to planning, monitoring, and control of the activity, considering the territorial implications of its development;
2. *The context and requirements of certification* present significant differences for producing and consuming countries;
3. *Social and environmental aspects* have had little relevance for the elaboration of certification norms for aquaculture;
4. *Certification systems* should consider federal legislation in the processes of definition of guidelines/standards for the countries;
5. *The process of establishment of certification systems* has not assured the rights of local populations effected by the aquaculture industry. The processes of consensus building for the establishment of norms for aquaculture certification has been characterized by the absence of participation of these populations and their representatives.

With a limited number of participants representing social organizations at the FAO event, we prioritized the group discussions that focused on social aspects and environmental aspects, actively participating in the two groups. The themes were: **social aspects, environmental aspects, and food security**.

In reference to **social and environmental aspects**, we made numerous contributions so that the guidelines/standards might contemplate:

- Respect for human rights, the right to life – repudiating the practices of violence against communities;
- The right to appropriate participation of local communities;
- References to the health of communities effected by the development of aquaculture;
- References to the impacts on fisheries production and to food security of populations implicated by the development of the aquaculture industry;
- Respect of workers’ security referenced in international norms on work and respect of national legislations;

- Consideration and inclusion of gender and age-class aspects in the development of the activity and their implications.

Explicit recommendations were made for the protection of traditional and ancestral populations (indigenous, afro-descendants, artisanal fishers, etc.). Furthermore, we recommended an evaluation of cumulative and regional aspects of established farms, as farms cannot be certified as isolated productive units; aquaculture feeds should be sustainable (ration, fish oils, etc.); high-value conservation habitats should be protected; protection of marine flood plains/mud flats; prevent fragmentation of ecosystems; and protection of migratory birds; problems related to discharge of effluents; among others associated with the decrease in biodiversity and the extinction of ecosystems fundamental for the traditional activities of communities. The final document included essential criteria for the continuity of discussions on certification, principally related to farms established in intertidal areas and that affect mangrove ecosystems. There was also described the social and environmental damage linked to the abandonment of productive activities and the necessity of environmental actions for the regeneration/recuperation of degraded areas, emphasizing integration of socio-environmental policy with discussions related to certification of the aquaculture industry.

It is important to point out that reports produced by Redmanglar Internacional; the document "Certificando la Destrucción C-Condem"; IBAMA's diagnostic study; the synthesis report of the Shrimp Farming Working Group for the Commission on Consumer Defense, Environment, and Minorities of the Lower Chamber of Congress (Brazil); and studies prepared by universities were widely used as a base for discussions. They acted as a counterpoint to inform and base the discussions with the other institutions (primarily GAA, NACA and SEAP) on the development of the certification process and the socio-environmental damage of the shrimp farming industry in Latin America.

The documents resulting from the discussion didn't present a definitive formulation and it wasn't clear how antagonistic points of view will be resolved.

A general evaluation of the group's participation

The process of definition of aquaculture certification standards is a process that doesn't end here and we don't have assurance of having our considerations incorporated. A relevant moment will be the publication of a new version in October and a comparison with the discussion terms undertaken in Fortaleza.

We consider that our participation, while still expressing an explicit counterpoint of certification and perspective was, and is, desired by the organizers of the event. We were sought out by Mr. Rohana P. Subasinghe, who demonstrated interest in following up this discussion in 2008 in Chile and in 2010, explicitly expressing his desire to have the participation of ICSF, Redmanglar and Rede Manguemar, among others, in these events.

The Brazilian government sought out the Brazilian organizations with the aim of inaugurating a debate on shrimp certification in Brazil and FAO proposed to be mediator or facilitator in the process, given the historically difficult relation maintained among the various stakeholders.

During the last day of the event we met and considered that our participation had gone well, taking advantage of the occasion to share a better understanding on the impacts of the salmon industry in Chile, which is characterized as environmentally unsustainable, socially unjust, and with products that are not safe for consumers, and in this sense demonstrates various similarities to the development of shrimp farming in Latin America and worldwide.

Finally, we considered it relevant that the international and national networks and organizations should discuss a follow-up strategy for the next initiatives of debate concerning certification in the sphere of FAO/NACA and National Governments.

It is necessary to fine-tune the intervention strategies among the social organizations which work with the impacts of shrimp farming and salmon farming in Latin America.

The document produced by this last consultation should be monitored and include a public evaluation of its content when the alterations are incorporated (October 2007).

The dialogue with international organizations such as FAO/NACA/WWF is not a substitute for the necessity of developing civil society initiatives in the sense of explaining the unsustainability of the development of these industries and increase consumer awareness of the context of the production of these food items.

We consider it of extreme importance to point out the people and entities, such as René Schärer of the Friends of Prainho de Canto Verde, Redmanglar Internacional, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers - ICSF, and Mangrove Action Project - MAP, who helped by facilitating our participation, contributing to the discussions, and especially with the translations.