
[Indonesia: WWF Wrongly Endorses Shrimp Farming in Aceh to Boost Tsunami Recovery!](#)

At the recent "Seafood Summit" conference event in Seattle organized by Seafood Choice Alliance (January 29-30, 2006), the WWF's "Aquaculture Specialist", Aaron A. McNevin, PhD, announced that WWF has formed the Sustainable Aquaculture Alliance, which is itself working towards some sort of farmed shrimp certification based upon Best Management Practices. He further stated that WWF is working with the Indonesian government, the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), NACA (Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific) and the World Bank to re-establish the shrimp farms that had been destroyed by the tsunami along the coast of Aceh in Sumatra, Indonesia.

WWF claims that they are doing this to help the local fishing communities in Aceh recuperate economically from their losses from the tsunami. According to McNevin, the shrimp farms were prior run by small-scale farmers, and this plan to re-establish these destroyed ponds was a way WWF saw to help these same local communities get back on their feet economically!

This so-called "recovery plan" for Aceh is a shocking revelation for many working for many years to halt further expansion of unsustainable shrimp farming. After all, it was the shrimp farm industry, along with other unsustainable developments, that removed the mangroves and other important features of a natural coastal greenbelt in the first place. Such a natural greenbelt or buffer zone had once offered some protection from hurricanes or tsunamis in the past, but these coastal areas were cleared and leveled to make way for shrimp ponds, tourist hotels, marinas and other developments, thus making the coastal areas much more vulnerable to natural disaster events, such as the tsunami of 2004.

It has even been rumored that the Indonesian military, which has been fighting against a persistent guerrilla insurgency in Aceh Province for over 30 years, may actually have intentionally encouraged shrimp ponds to replace the cover of mangroves to eliminate places where the insurgents could take refuge.

Although the tsunami event was a natural disaster resulting from the immense earthquake which occurred on Dec. 26th, 2004 off the north coast of Sumatra around Aceh province, the high death toll can be partly, if not largely, attributed to a man-made, unnatural disaster. This unnatural disaster preceded the tsunamis that struck such a fatal blow along the coasts of Asia and Africa. This earlier disaster, which set the stage for the subsequent tsunami events, was man-made by greed and shortsightedness, resulting in the clearing of the natural buffer zones once present along the same coastlines which were so hard hit by the tsunamis. Extensive mangrove forests, coral reefs, sea grass beds, sand dunes, peatlands and other natural features served as barriers to wind and wave. Once these natural protective buffers were removed, the full forces of the tsunamis lashed the vulnerable coastlines resulting in the higher death tolls in both Asia and East Africa.

It is now believed by many experts studying the disaster that where mangroves, coral reefs and other natural barriers still stood the resultant destructive force of the tsunamis was much less, and in these

same protected areas many lives were spared.

As asserted above, the early warning system had long ago been sounded. These were the cries of warning from mangrove ecologists, local communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that protested the illegal expansion of shrimp aquaculture, tourism and other unsustainable industries along these same contested coastlines.

The local communities, once sheltered from the storms by these natural barriers, were exposed to this type of disaster because of the prior onslaught of another disaster—largely unregulated, poorly planned, industrial development along the vital coastal zone. This often illicit and controversial development was largely supported and promoted by such international lending agencies as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and US AID, as well as the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. These often controversial institutions should be spotlighted for their prior grievous wrongs in supporting the kinds of destructive and unsustainable developments that laid the coasts of the affected regions open and vulnerable to the fatal blow of the December tsunamis.

Though there had been earlier warnings that such a disaster would take place, few in government or industry paid attention. Instead they ignored the ample warnings in favor of proven unsustainable management policies that further degraded these protective coastal zones. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, shrimp farming itself was heavily supported by millions of dollars of World Bank loans, as well as by NACA and the FAO via research and development programs along the same coastlines where the tsunamis struck.

“The World Bank participated actively in the launching of the shrimp industry in Asia. Out of an investment of US\$ 1.685 billion in 1992 for Indian agriculture and fisheries, the World Bank allocated US\$ 425 million for aquaculture development (Mukherjee, 1994). A substantial part of this sum seems to be destined for intensification and expansion of shrimp ponds. The involvement of the World Bank in shrimp aquaculture, and the development of related hatcheries and other shrimp facilities, illustrates of the trends towards internationally organized vertical integration of this industry (O’Neil, 1994, 10-11)...” (Solon Barraclough, et al, Some Ecological and Social Implications of Commercial Shrimp Farming In Asia, 1995)

This massive support by these governmental and inter-governmental agencies led to rapid and uncontrolled expansion of the shrimp aquaculture industry in the Developing World, especially affecting the mangrove forested regions. Shrimp farming is considered to be the number one cause of mangrove forest loss by many researchers who have documented the rate of mangrove loss, which now stands at around 1% to 2% per year.

Instead of re-establishing an unsustainable shrimp farm industry in the mangrove related wetland areas of Aceh Province, a more effective path towards a protective greenbelt restoration and long-term, local community reparation must be offered in hopes to avert such an unnatural natural disaster in the future. WWF needs to revise its plans for tsunami recovery, as their promotion of shrimp farming as a means for economic benefit to the poor coastal communities is a terrible mistake in both judgment and policy!

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