



... it's time for this industry to stop taking these corals for granted and accept their real value...

While the optimists among us felt that the ban would be lifted sooner or later, the disastrous collapse of the Fijian live coral and live rock sector which followed that country's still-puzzling decision to ban collection and exports over the 2017-2018 Xmas/New Year period, had demonstrated that optimism offers no guarantees whatsoever when it comes to banning orders being rescinded.

The Indonesian Coral Shell and Ornamental Fish Association (AKKII) immediately challenged the decision and initiated discussions with the Indonesian authorities in an attempt to find a way forward. Their efforts were supported by Ornamental Fish International (OFI) who convened a meeting during Interzoo (8-10 May) attended by AKKII and, very importantly, the Executive Secretary of the Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries.

When asked regarding the reason behind the ban, the Executive Secretary responded that there was no specific reason, but that the ban was needed as part of a restructuring process of the cooperative links between the ministries involved in the issuing of CITES permits, as well as health certification. He also stressed that the measure was required in order to strengthen surveillance and monitoring of the trade to ensure that it met management guidelines. He further stated that Indonesia is currently embarking on a five-year plan which will include an assessment of the sustainable use of its natural resources.

Put all the above together and it becomes clear that what I suspected several months ago, appears to be the case: i.e. that several ministries were involved in the process and that there seemed to be some lack of clarity as to how close, or otherwise, the liaison between them was. The result, quite clearly, and almost inevitably, led to confusion and to a ban that no-one expected or could see the logic of.

Following the Interzoo meeting, OFI – with support from the Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) and

the European Pet Organisation (EPO) - wrote to the Indonesian Minister of Environment and Forestry, Ibu Siti Nurbaya Bakar, on 30 May. Among many other things, the letter highlighted the fact that OFI members, including those from Indonesia, account for around 60% of all the aquatic organisms that are traded worldwide, that its Charter supports the sustainable farming and harvesting of ornamental fish and invertebrates - including corals, and that it supports measures aimed at sustainable management.

Despite acknowledging the need to regulate commercial activities, OFI was deeply concerned regarding the potential damage that a ban would cause to the Indonesian export sector and to the industry in general, since the country currently supplies 50-60% of all the corals traded throughout the world. Further, around US\$35 million has, so far, been invested in the Indonesian coral sector, which employs around 12,000 people, thus playing an important role in poverty alleviation, education and livelihood sustainability. It also pointed out that, as a signatory to the Coral Reef Life Declaration, Indonesia was committed to recognising the benefits of engaging with businesses to achieve conservation. In this respect, many OFI members and others have long been involved in sustainability projects and, even, in coral reef rebuilding and rehabilitation programmes. The letter ended by expressing the hope of a speedy resolution of the export suspension.

On 25 September, i.e. nearly five months after the suspension order was implemented, a public hearing was held in the Indonesian House of Representatives to discuss the matter. Attended by representatives of a host of different government ministries and other departments (no wonder the level of communication that I have referred to above and in an earlier instalment was – shall we say – less than what it should have been!) the meeting ended up with the House of Representatives asking all the various departments and ministers “to immediately revoke

the ban on coral and anemone traffic permits in order to increase the value of national exports and improve community welfare involved in it.”

One week later (on 1 October), the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries finally lifted the ban. So... we are back on stream at last! Well... not quite. The fact is that, while the suspension has been lifted, exporters now need to obtain the relevant export permits (including CITES clearance). As I write, we are still awaiting news that the first permits have been issued. Nevertheless, normality will probably have been restored by the time we go to press.

In a statement issued after the announcement, AKKII says that the ban has been lifted: “... following a conciliation meeting in front of all (the) different ministries in the Indonesian National Parliament.” The Association goes on to acknowledge that: “... it's time for this industry to stop taking these corals for granted and accept their real value... (the) regulations surrounding this industry must be improved and followed, so only responsible stakeholders are allowed to work, for the benefit of all. Our industry must self-regulate so that the people who are doing the right thing don't suffer because of a few ready-for-anything players.”

So... the crisis is now over, and while we may justifiably be critical of many aspects of the implementation of the suspension and the obvious lack of communication channels between departments, it could well be that the Indonesian coral and anemone sector will come out of this crisis stronger and with more vigour, and more aware of the need to protect Indonesia's natural resources than ever before. ■

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