

As regular readers of this column will know, the Indonesian authorities implemented a ban on all coral exports from the country last May. Obviously, this has had widespread repercussions, and not just for the coral farmers and collectors. Thousands of jobs have been lost in Indonesia itself, along with valuable revenue, but coral importers around the globe have also been badly affected.

The Indonesian Corals, Shell and Ornamental Fish Association (AKKII) has been working ceaselessly to have the ban repealed and, while they remain optimistic that the matter will be resolved, there is still no sign of this happening anytime soon. So, as things stand at the moment, the coral sector is in a state of paralysis and, although we may all wonder in amazement at the confusing and, at times, contradictory sounds coming out of the country, the inescapable fact is that the crisis shows no signs of going away.

But all is not lost! At least, not if the latest news I've received end up yielding the results that those at the heart of the new moves are hoping for. According to the founders of the Archipelago Ornamental Coral Farmers Association (APKHN), one of the factors blocking progress is that wild and cultured corals are being considered together.

While, at first sight, this may not appear to be a major obstacle, it is. The reason is that some of those who are in a position to influence decisions, don't appear to be communicating with each other with either an open mind or open agenda. Take, for instance, the Honorable Minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, Coordinating Minister of Maritime Affairs, who indicated at a meeting with OFI President Shane Willis that he thought farmed corals should be exported, but, maybe, wild corals should be left in the sea.

It would therefore seem that, if some way could be found of separating farmed from wild-collected corals, a way forward might become possible, even if wild harvest for export were to resume at some stage in the future.

Not surprisingly, this challenge has been taken on board by a group of Indonesian coral farmers, the founders of the above-mentioned APKHN, who are concentrating entirely on farmed corals. It needs to be mentioned that farmed corals have, traditionally, constituted a significant part of Indonesia's coral exports, with some \$30 million having been invested in the sector over the past decade or so. Thus, finding a way of 'rescuing' this investment would seem, not just desirable, but essential.

As yet, the Association, which currently consists of 15 members of the Indonesian coral farming community with nearly 20 years' experience in coral culture, is so new that it doesn't even have a website, although this may well be in place by the time we go to press.

According to an article by Vincent Chalias published on the online website, reef builders (<http://reefbuilders.com/2019/01/10>), members of the new Association were selected "based on their records, their production plan, years of experience, if they started culturing corals before getting (a) wild corals license, their willingness to work together in a mutual way, etc." It also appears that a set of standards would be developed before admitting new members.

As I've said, this Association is brand new – so new that the list of founder members was not available at the time of writing. Further, as experience has taught me over the years, the establishing of workable, unambiguous standards, is a lengthy and, often, complicated affair, so it might still be some time before everything is in place and APKHN members can begin doing business.

Let's not forget either that the events of the past months have demonstrated very forcefully that negotiating with the Indonesian authorities can be a frustrating and confusing process, especially when so many departments want to have their say as to what should, or should not, be allowed.

Apparently, the APKHN team began approaching the government several months ago and received positive feedback, which sounds encouraging, but time will tell. It's also worth considering that, if the first approach was made some months ago, could this have affected the authorities' stance on wild corals? Could they, for example, be digging their heels in and not repealing the ban because they know that an alternative association to AKKII is being set up? And, speaking of AKKII, how will the two associations co-operate with each other? Will they co-operate at all? Is, for example, the new Association a splinter group of AKKII members that will compete with AKKII? All this is unclear at this stage and I must confess that I have absolutely no idea how things will pan out, but I'll obviously report further in due course. ■



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