



The Second International Conference and Exhibition on the Marketing and Shipping of Live Aquatic Products '99

by Yvonne Sadovy¹

The above conference was held from 14–17 November 1999, in Seattle, Washington and covered the marketing and shipping of finfish, shellfish, 'ornamentals' (aquarium fish) and plants. A wide range of subjects was addressed with an interesting mix of business, science, advocacy, capture and culture, presented by government officers, biologists, businessmen, engineers, conservationists, fishers and mariculturists, to name but a few. Topics ranged from physiology to social, ethical and humanitarian considerations, wildlife and health, regulations and the problem of introducing exotic species, to live-holding-system engineering, live shipment issues, resource management and marketing. This range reflects the many areas involved in the business of maintaining and marketing live aquatic organisms. There was much interest in the high-value Hong Kong/mainland China live seafood market and the possible acceptability of species, including cold-water species, currently not included in the Hong Kong-based trade; New Zealand, Australian, and North American companies were among those exploring trading possibilities in fishes and invertebrates.

A brief summary is given of just a few of the 40 or so interesting talks representing some of the range of subjects presented. The selections inevitably reflect my own interests or addressed areas that were new to me. Moreover, this summary is by no means exhaustive; the Proceedings will be out soon and I did sneak off briefly to take a look at downtown Seattle! Based in Hong Kong, I am aware of the trade in live animals that come from coral reefs. However, there has been a live fish fishery off California for the local Asian market since at least 1988 (see Tegner & Dayton, *SPC Live Reef Fish Information Bulletin* 2: 25–26) which includes various rockfishes (scorpaenids), kelp greenling, ling cod and sheepshead wrasse. Data have been collected since 1993 and there are over 1,000 fishers involved, active from the intertidal zone to a depth of 20 fathoms. There is concern about overfishing. For ornamental (marine aquarium) fisheries, talks covered concerns regarding 'hit-and-run' types of collecting and the advantages and disadvantages of the Florida-based fishery; the marine aquarium fishery is managed but not based on biological information, simply based on some compromise

acceptable to both government authorities and fishers. Humanitarian concerns were also expressed in the treatment and sale of live organisms in general; the need for a practical code of ethics was identified. Concerns were also expressed regarding the overfishing of blue crab in some areas.

Interesting presentations were given on physiological differences among species that make them more or less able to withstand the stress involved in capture and shipment. Even closely related species (the example given involved crabs) may differ in this respect; a difference that could make a species more or less suited to live trade. An understanding of the stress response is also clearly important for reducing mortality and maintaining quality (and, dare I say it, for reducing cruel and unusual punishment!). One speaker suggested that data on mortality would be useful in addressing such problems and for working towards practical solutions. It is clear that such issues cannot be ignored; there has been at least one lawsuit filed to ban trade in live marine organisms in the United States. Public interest and concern over the treatment of live organisms, in the West at least, has been growing in the last 30 years.

We learned about the intricacies of the HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) methodology. About 30 per cent of seafood is traded internationally. There are several problems with current international trade that involve food safety concerns, such as paralytic shellfish poisoning and ciguatera fish poisoning. A major problem in applying the HACCP guidelines is determining when a hazard is significant and poses an unacceptable risk to the consumer; does this mean that someone has to die first before the guidelines are rigorously applied? Also an issue is the possibility of introducing internationally, water-shipped organisms, such as dinoflagellates, that could cause problems in the future if successfully transferred.

Overall, the prognosis among industry members for the live food trade as a high-value, quality market, was very good. Issues of overexploitation, animal welfare, suitable-species selection, reduced mortality and exotic introductions, however, need to be addressed and were just a few of those discussed—plenty of food for thought!



1. Department of Ecology & Biodiversity, University of Hong Kong, Pok Fu Lam Road, Hong Kong, China. yjsadovy@hkusua.hku.hk