

From Asia/ Thailand

Revivers of the Thai Seas

The following 'communique' was issued at a seminar held in November 2000 in Hatyai, Thailand. It is compiled from information provided by the Project on Coastal Zone Management through Community Organizations and Networks in Southern Thailand.

Fisherfolk, academics, students, NGOs and social activists held a seminar on 'Fisherfolk and Coastal Resources Management: Problems and the Strategies for Finding Solutions'. This was held at the Central Library, Prince of Songkhla University, Hatyai, Songkhla Province from 18 to 20 November 2000. The communique issued was as follows:

1. Thai seas are now in crisis with the ecological fallout of overfishing due to the use of destructive fishing gear that destroy aquatic life. The total area under mangrove forests has decreased from 2 million rai to 1 million rai (1 rai equals 2.5 acres) between 1961 to 1999. Songkhla lake has become shallow because of the impact of the 'Pakrava Dam'. Waterways are polluted by waste-water from factories and shrimp farms. These crises must be solved urgently by every sector of society to bring life back to Thai seas.

2. The rehabilitation of Thai seas must be based on a clear vision, together with a clear target for recovering the bounty and biodiversity of marine resources. The administration and management of the coastal resources should be initiated with people's participation in all activities, and by respecting the rights of the community to benefit from the sustainable economic use of the resources of the sea.

3. Fisherfolk have been misunderstood by some segments of Thai society and it is believed that they are fighting for more fish trade and for more profits. In fact, the way of life of fisherfolk is simple. They use boats and small-scale fishing gear that do not destroy the sea and its resources. The main objective of their struggle is to demand the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

4. The participants of this seminar agree to continue work towards the following objectives:

- To increase community awareness, to reinforce networks of co-operation for the conservation and revival of Thai seas, to protect the community against destruction of natural resources, and to protect their rights to it;
- To campaign for the amendment of the Fishery Law, so that it is in agreement with the constitution of 1997, creating the space for the empowerment of people in resources management, for respecting local and community rights, and for reinforcing people's participation in making policies and laws related to the sea and to the way of life of local people;
- To prohibit fishing gear that destroy the marine ecological system and natural resources.

5. The recommendations to be submitted to politicians and political parties are as follows:

- Change the aim of marine resources management, from an economic to an ecological orientation, with the greatest emphasis on restoring the marine environment.
- To improve the Fisheries Law of 1947 with people's participation;
- To prohibit destructive fishing gear, such as push nets, trawl nets and the use of electric lights for nocturnal anchovy fishing.

We, the network of people's organizations, strongly state our common will to revive the Thai seas. We will follow-up on our proposals and demands with the government, politicians, political parties and concerned sectors, to maintain the integrity of the marine ecosystem and the food and economic security of Thai people, and to make sure that the Thai seas will be a heritage for future generations.

(For further details contact ff-net@hatyaiinet.co.th)