

# Aquaculture Governance Indicators (AGIs) assessment synthesis report

## Country:

Thailand

## Species:

Whiteleg shrimp (*L. vannamei*)

Blacktiger shrimp (*P. monodon*)

Giant freshwater prawn (*M. rosenbergii*)

Information presented based on assessment conducted February 2019.

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## Country overview

Thailand is one of the main shrimp-producing countries in the world, producing 340,000 metric tonnes in 2016. Shrimp production is done primarily via intensive farming methods. The main species are *L. vannamei* and, to a lesser but still important extent, *M. rosenbergii* and *P. monodon*. Production volumes severely declined between 2011 and 2014 due to disease outbreak (Early Mortality Syndrome). Most of the production is export-oriented, with the US, Japan and increasingly Vietnam as main importing countries. A relatively large share (~ 50%) of shrimp is processed into value-added products in Thailand.

According to the [2020 Seafood Watch report](#), Thai shrimp has a yellow ranking overall (note: the report only covers *L. vannamei*), with one major issue related to feed (red) and most others areas of concern (yellow) except for

source of stock and introduction of secondary species (green).

## Legislation

The Royal Ordinance on Fisheries covers most Seafood Watch issue areas to some extent (1,2,4,5 and 7), although not comprehensively. The Ordinance has given the Department of Fisheries (DoF) the authority to act and implement various regulations, such as those related to diseases, traceability, and water discharge. The Ordinance explicitly mentions the precautionary approach. Both discharge of water without treatment and use of antibiotics are prohibited. However, there is no indication of organized regional planning considering cumulative ecosystem effects. Interviews point at conflict between the Department of Fisheries and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment regarding this issue.

Responsibilities are clearly defined in laws and regulations. Interviews point to some overlap between departments and/or issues dealt with by the wrong department. Within the DoF there are many departments working on shrimp aquaculture. Jurisdictions are appropriate, as the DoF has offices at local level as well.

The DoF is fully aware of the barriers for small-scale farmers to comply with legislation and has implemented various policies such as free extension services and free sample residue testing. It is currently promoting a 'cluster approach' in which groups of small-scale farmers cooperate and partner with banks, industry, the government and sometimes NGOs.

Most of the producers are complying to legislation, but there is clear evidence of

barriers (e.g. resources required to comply with environmental regulations, change of technology). Monitoring occurs through on-site visits and residue testing for export (but not for domestic market). Offices and sub-departments have to report on a number of criteria, but this is mostly data-driven (e.g. number of licensed farms). Evaluation of legislation does not occur systematically but tends to occur through political windows of opportunity.

Thailand is considered the lead actor in regional (ASEAN) regulation regarding aquaculture. Thailand adapts easily and implements all regional legislation which deals with Seafood Watch issue areas. There have been trade sanctions taken against the aquaculture industry recently, e.g. the EU issuing a yellow card for Thai seafood. Most sanctions relate to labour laws and human trafficking in processing plants. The EU yellow card has been lifted recently because of major improvements.

### **Voluntary codes and standards**

There are eight standards that play an important role in Thai shrimp aquaculture: 1) ASC; 2) BAP; 3) Naturland; 4) ASIC Shrimp; 5) Thai GAP; 6) Thai GAP-7401; 7) Thai Code of Conduct (CoC); and 8) ASEAN GAP.

Uptake varies significantly across the private and public standards in Thailand. Thai GAP is being widely adopted but only a few sites are ASC certified, for example. Uptake of BAP is highest among the global private standards. The CoC was based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Good Aquaculture Practices but has not been widely adopted. Thai GAP is more accessible (even if less comprehensive) and is required for producers wanting to sell to processors (mainly related to food safety).

Thai GAP-7401 is relatively new and aspires to get international acknowledgement as a sustainability standard.

The public standards have largely been developed by government experts, although they have recently started to open up through public consultations. Private standards are generally perceived to be only applicable to large-scale production because of their costs and complexity, although group certification methodologies have been introduced to partly overcome this problem.

The government explicitly encourages public standards as a reference point and supports private standards by recognizing them. Export companies often support producers to cover the costs of compliance. At the same time, support available to support small-scale farmers is deemed insufficient. In terms of transparency, some private standards (e.g. ASC) make their conformity assessment reports publicly available and searchable, but not all. Reports for the public standards are not easily available.

For public standards, the government division responsible for monitoring does not have sufficient capacity to reflect on the incoming data. Most private standards periodically undergo a review process including stakeholder consultation. This review process is mostly concerned with the content of the standards and not with the actual implementation.

Criteria of different standards are mostly consistent, with some minor deviations. For some standards, farmers can easily comply with two standards at the same time. There are however also complaints from the industry regarding the lack of coordination between the standards.

## Collaborative arrangements

There were four collaborative arrangements selected: 1) public-private governance – industry and government via private-public partnerships; 2) interactive governance – the Seafood Taskforce, multi-stakeholder initiative (MSI) formed to address labour rights in shrimp industry; 3) non-state self-governance – ASIC shrimp, regional MSI targeted at smallholders and sustainability improvements; 4) industry self-governance – i) 'shrimp days' – monthly event throughout entire country where key stakeholders gather to discuss issues, organized by aquaculture companies and attended by government and farmers; ii) cluster management – arrangements between farmers, banks, processors, and insurance companies to work towards private certification.

The coverage of Seafood Watch issue areas is very limited, except for ASIC which is designed to follow Seafood Watch criteria. The main focus is on industry development, protection, and control. Some of the collaborative arrangements report on their activities, but not all. Reporting is also incomplete.

Most of the collaborative arrangements are working on best practices and demonstrate willingness to take up lessons from the past. However, there is no evident coordination between collaborative arrangements but the cluster approach is an example of coordination between collaborative arrangements and certifications. Deliberation in the Seafood Taskforce has led to amendments in legislation and increased uptake of social issues in codes and standards.

## Capabilities

Five actors were selected to assess this dimension: i) Department of Fisheries (state); ii) Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (state); iii) WWF Thailand (civil society); iv) National Farmer's Council of Thailand (civil society); and v) BAP (market).

The DoF has opened up its policy process and has become more consultative. There is general acknowledgement among the industry and government of some problems, although not all issues are openly discussed. Interaction between academia, government and the industry takes place regularly. All actors are relatively open for engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders.

Farmers indicate that their ideas are being heard, but not translated into strategies. The National Farmer's Council is organized to represent bottom-up interests. Overall, reflexivity regarding environmental issues that do not directly impact productivity could be improved

Staff training gets considerable attention from various actors. The DoF is especially aware of the need of this. Most actors have some M&E programmes, but there are indications that these receive insufficient funds.

The majority of actors are involved in pilot activities. These are often focussed on best management practices. Some interviews point at the unwillingness of the industry and the government to adopt and endorse innovative farming practices that require less inputs and lower stocking densities based on natural principles, despite proven effectiveness (biomimicry).

The majority of actors have structures or partnerships in place that allow for coordination at different levels of governance. Actors have considerable resources (human, financial, and material) to attend or participate in meetings or communication activities with their target audience. Various approaches are taken, such as hand-outs, workshops, booklets, newspapers and online platforms for communication. There are specific radio stations aimed at the shrimp industry (farmers can call and ask questions). However, when controversial issues arise, communication is mostly reactive.

### **Actionable insights**

Legislation: both the coverage and implementation of legislation has drastically improved since 2015, although the detail and stringency of environmental criteria can still be improved; cumulative impacts receive relatively little attention; and environmental concerns translate only to export-oriented aquaculture production.

Voluntary codes and Standards: there is a need for more inclusive processes of standard-setting to ensure relevance for the Thai context; the standards that most extensively cover the Seafood Watch issue areas also seem to be unattractive and not suited for small-scale producers (except ASIC and Thai GAP-7401); increased coordination between standards – including the public standards – can decrease complexity and lead to more productive cooperation for improvement pathways; and supporting the improvement of Thai GAP-7401 could be a worthwhile engagement strategy to support the sustainability performance of the aquaculture industry.

Collaborative arrangements: there is a gap in the scope of the collaborations—several important Seafood Watch issue areas are not covered; there is a need for an increase in scope via more attention to environmental issues; more clearly defined goals and activity plans combined with learning strategies should be made to ensure deliberation results in sustainability outcomes.

Capabilities: despite reasonable overall levels of reflexivity, not all issues are always acknowledged and there are some hierarchies that impede full reflexivity; innovation drive seems to be limited to innovations that do not threaten existing business models; and communication between actors appears to be well-organized, but proactive outsider engagement regarding controversial issues is limited.