

ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, comprises Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Formed in 1967, external political pressures have recently increased ASEAN areas of cooperation. In this article, Veravat Hongskul records the accelerating ASEAN cooperation towards regional fisheries development. Ed.

Fisheries Development in ASEAN Countries

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THE IMPORTANCE of fisheries contribution to the national economies is well recognized among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries, particularly as a source of animal protein food and thus improving the nutritional diet of the people, and as a source of foreign exchange earning. Fisheries also play a significant role in providing employment opportunities and thus improving the standard of living of fishermen, fish farmers and their families.

Recent statistics on fisheries production of the ASEAN member coun-

tries indicated significant development during the period 1972 to 1977 (Figure 1). The total production had increased from 4.4 million tons to 5.9 million tons with an average rate of increase of about 6.5%/yr. Among various components of fisheries in the region, marine fisheries indicated a rapid increase, i.e., 19.25% in 1977. The decline of marine production in 1974 was observed due to the effect of oil crises which resulted in lower production in Thailand. Nevertheless it is obvious from Figures 1 and 2 that marine fisheries play an important role in the development of fisheries among the ASEAN member countries. It has contributed more than 80% to the total production in the region.

The inland fisheries contributed about 9.8% to the total production. Annual production, however, shows a fluctuating trend (Figure 2). Decreasing production was observed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. It is therefore doubtful on the possibility of increasing production from the inland sources without a drastic change in management strategies. On the other hand, aquaculture components seem to yield a promise for further development. The aquaculture production among the ASEAN member countries has increased from .41 million tons in 1972 to .56 million tons in 1977, with

an average rate of increase of about 6%/yr. Rapid increases in aquaculture production were observed during 1974-76, particularly in Thailand and Indonesia.

The ASEAN governments have placed high priority to the fisheries development programs in the region with main objectives to increase food supply to the people and to increase incomes of fishermen and fish farmers.

In early 1977, the ASEAN Economic Ministers supported the study on the regional fish resources in the ASEAN region as one of the priority areas for regional cooperation. As a consequence, a number of meetings on the ASEAN fisheries took place in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1979-80* in order to review the status of fisheries resources in the ASEAN region and their potentials for development. There were also discussions on the fishery management strategies and common problem areas to be studied in order to develop the ASEAN Fisheries Development Projects.

One of the major problem areas is the fisheries resource evaluation. The ASEAN governments are now deeply concerned to know the magnitude of their resources, both within their present boundaries and within the boundaries of their extended jurisdiction under the new ocean regime. They must know this in order to decide which can be expanded and which should not be expanded or possibly reduced. This information will become the basic benchmark used to establish national development objectives, and to develop strategies for development and management of the resources available to their countries.

The extension of jurisdiction and the more intensive exploitation that will arise from such actions can also have disastrous effects on the small inshore

*These include the ASEAN Meeting on Fisheries Resources Management, February 1979; ASEAN Consultative Meeting on Fisheries, December 1979; ASEAN Meeting of Technical Experts on Fisheries Resource Evaluation, January 1980; ASEAN Technical Experts Meeting on Aquaculture, January 1980. Two further Coordinating Group meetings are scheduled later this year.

fishermen of the region and hence the state of those stocks exploited by inshore fishermen must be urgently appraised. The effects of rational development and management of these stocks will place extreme stress on the small-scale fishermen to explore other avenues of fish production. It is therefore necessary to determine the potential fishery resources in the coastal areas and the possibility of developing the coastal aquaculture as well.

A fisheries resource evaluation project was already formulated by a group of fishery resource appraisal experts from the ASEAN member countries to provide solutions to the above-mentioned problems. It proposed to mount a crash program to assess the stocks of fish in the region and to provide training for national research officers by establishing regional training centers on stock assessment and acoustic surveys. It was also noted that much of this work has already been started by some international/regional organizations in the ASEAN region such as the Indo-Pacific Fishery Commission (IPFC), South China Sea Coordinating Programme (SCSP), Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) and ICLARM. With continuing support and assistance from these organizations, it is envisaged that this project could be implemented in 1980 or 1981.

Concerning the aquaculture aspect, the aquaculture experts from the ASEAN member countries had iden-

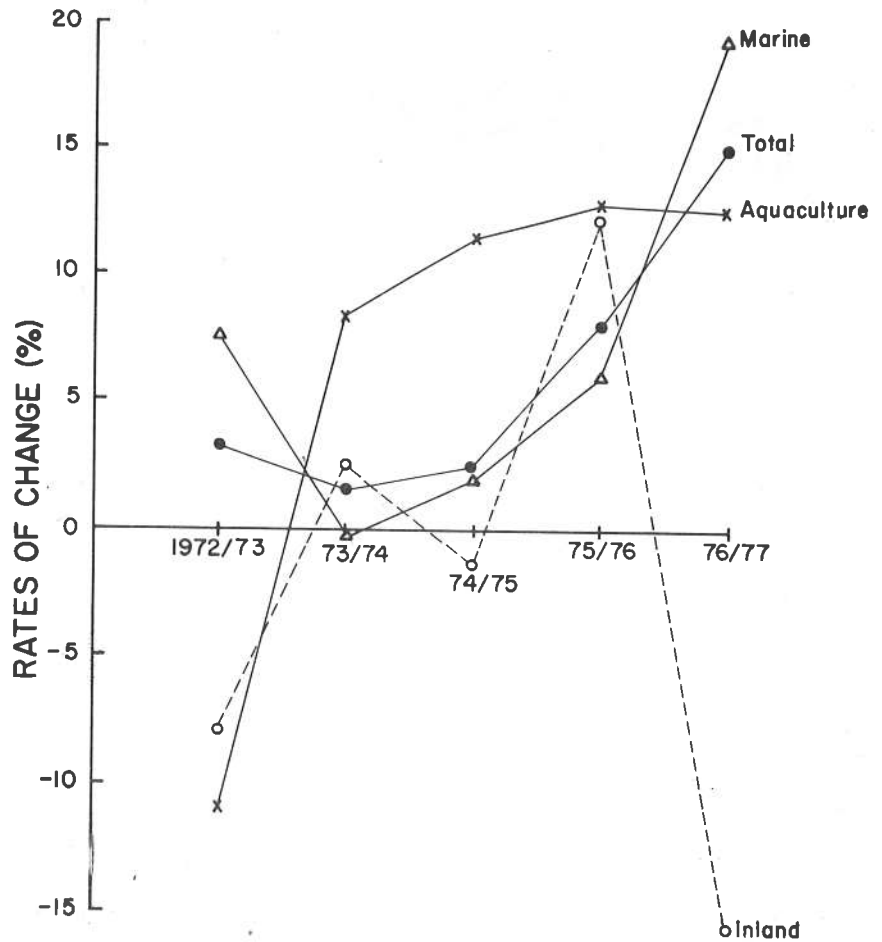


Fig. 2. Rates of annual changes in fishing production by major sectors.

tified a number of action areas, namely, the assessment of coastal aquaculture potential, mariculture development, development of inland aquaculture services, rural aquaculture development and aquaculture extension and training. In order to carry out these programs more effectively among member countries, an ASEAN

Aquaculture Development and Coordinating Program was formulated as a package program for implementation by each member country. Some donor countries have already expressed interest in funding such a program.

The development of fisheries in the ASEAN countries to fulfill its ultimate goal will require more action-oriented programs. The two cited examples are only the indication of strong intention of the countries concerned in maximizing the benefits from the fishery resources, in both biological and socioeconomic aspects, of the fisheries in the South China Sea region. There are still many other areas to be explored and developed to obtain full utilization of the resources, such as post-harvest technology, extension services, cooperative fishing, joint research on shared stocks and multispecies problems, etc. These problem areas emphasize the need for integrating and strengthening the national and regional fishery programs in order to fully develop the fisheries in the region. ●

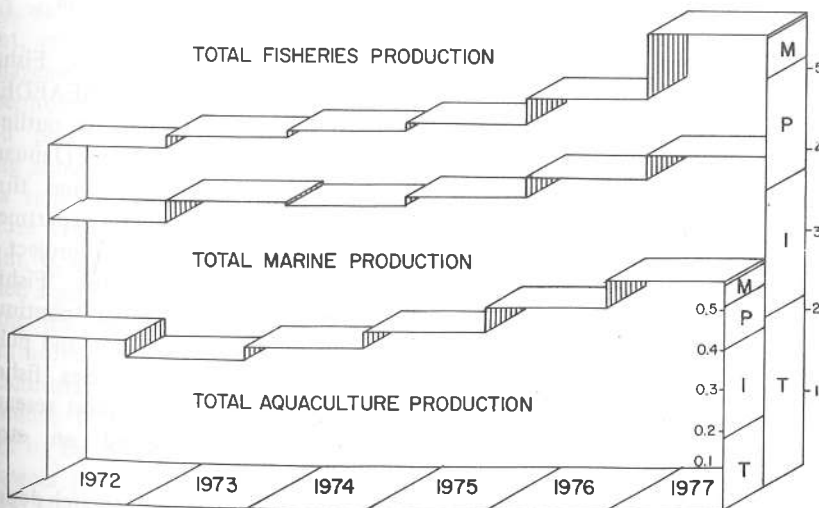


Fig. 1. Total fisheries production by ASEAN countries during 1972-1977 (in million metric tons).