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Working together to save shrimp

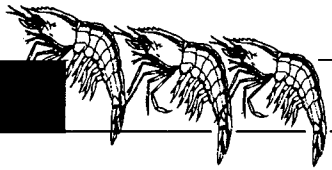
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Working together to save shrimp

THE NETWORK OF AQUATIC ANIMAL HEALTH or NAAH was formed to take up arms against the nemesis of the shrimp industry: the luminous bacteria. It is national in scope, with three participating agencies: AQD, the Philippine Council for Aquatic and Marine Research and Development (PCAMRD), and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

A spin-off of NAAH is the Task Force *Oplan-Sagip-sugpo* (transl. Save-the-Shrimp) (see next page). This group aims to come up with solutions to rehabilitate the shrimp industry and map out strategies for its sustainability.

"We need appropriate technologies for each culture system," stressed AQD Chief Dr. Rolando Platon, "including extensive (stocking density: 1-3 shrimp per m²), semi-intensive (3-10 per m²), and intensive (higher than 10 per m²)."

"There is always a tendency for the industry to go intensive which becomes dangerous when the organic matter exceeds the capacity of the receiving water to break it down. The pollution expelled by the overcrowded animals them-

selves, the excess feeds and other organic wastes wreak havoc on our rivers and other waterways."

Thus for environmental reasons, AQD does not and will not recommend the intensive system which many pond operators practice for profit's sake. But Dr. Platon believes that the present intensive fishfarmers should not be left alone with their problems. "We should deal with these intensive farms and the wastes they produce. We should come up with technology appropriate for their use."

Meanwhile, AQD has advised shrimp farmers to try polyculture with commodities such as seaweeds and molluscs. The "cleansing" effect of seaweeds and molluscs in shrimp ponds is an ongoing study at AQD.

An industry practitioner and consultant before he became AQD Chief, Dr. Platon said NAAH will put in place a strong monitoring system. "When something is wrong, everybody must know about it. AQD is going to be the center or headquarters of the network."

Dr. Platon showed the gravity of the shrimp problem by citing the decline in production caused largely by the luminous bacteria: 30,000 tons in 1991, down to 22,000 tons in 1992, to 20,000 tons in 1996. All these on a culture area of 47,000 hectares. He said other countries, Indonesia and India for instance, have more areas to develop into shrimp ponds. In the Philippines, because of limited land space, most farmers went intensive, stocking as high as 300,000-500,000 fry per hectare, resulting in pollution, fish diseases and mortalities.

NAAH will have to strike a happy medium between profitability and the sustainability of the ecosystem. The industry practitioners are crying out to aquaculture scientists for help. AQD which is at the heart of NAAH must answer the call for technology. *By J. Carreon-Lagoc*

