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Policy Brief

CONSUMER AWARENESS ON ILLEGAL AND UNSUSTAINABLE FISHING IN THE CORAL TRIANGLE

Creating consumer awareness and accreditation for Coral Triangle fisheries
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SUMMARY: This policy brief serves to propose a demand-side solution to address the threat climate change has on the fisheries in the Coral Triangle – a region located in the Asia Pacific and scientifically declared to be “the global centre of marine biodiversity”ⁱ. Addressed to the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) Executive Secretariat, a multilateral and multi-stakeholder partnership, this brief identifies the lack of international recognition on the global relevance of the Triangle; proposes for the inclusive of the creation of consumer awareness as part of planned initiatives to increase the CTI’s profile; and lastly a suggestion for the Secretariat to develop an accreditation scheme to better trace and inform consumers of unsustainable fishing practices within the Coral Triangle.

1. The lack of an international recognition on the significance of the CTI.

A simple Google Trends search revealed the lack of recognition on the Coral Triangle region, as compared to the Great Barrier Reef (Appendix A). This is particularly concerning as three out of six Coral Triangle Countries are included in the top 25 marine capture producersⁱⁱ. As stated by Executive Director Mr Widi in the 2015-2016 CTI Annual Activities Reportⁱⁱⁱ, raising the profile of the Coral Triangle as a region of high biological significance is crucial. Marine biodiversity and productive fish stocks in this region are coupled and will both be severely affected by climate change and its consequences. As marine capture is an internationally traded commodity, and one of the CTI’s main focus is the sustainability of its fisheries, it only makes sense for this multilateral Initiative to devise policies which will enhance the traceability of marine capture. This is such that consumers and the wider international

community are made aware of the presence of unsustainable practices that are threatening to worsen climate change impacts on the biodiversity and productivity of the Coral Triangle.

2. Aligning academia, science and consumer knowledge on impact of fisheries in the biodiverse Coral Triangle.

While illegal and unsustainable fishing within this region are common news and academic topics^{iv,v,vii}, there is an absence of its correlation to the ecological and social significance, sensitivity and the compounding impacts of climate change on the Coral Triangle. As such, policy for increase the profile of this region should include focus on changing marine produce consumer awareness on their purchasing choices. It is estimated that the global cost of illegal fishing is up to \$10-23.5 billion a year^{viii}. Therefore, in diverting consumer

purchasing power to more ecologically sound and managed fishing methods, there will be an increased chance of preserving the ecological integrity of the Coral Triangle in light of climate change.

As of now, engagement is very much focused on the political and social sphere while economics and private sector interests are less targeted. While it is crucial to ensure that the supply end of fisheries are managed (through existing initiatives such as streamlining of export regulations)^{ix}, policies on demand-side solutions should be adopted in complement as well. As such, the CTI Secretariat, along with relevant stakeholders, need to be intentional in their plans to increase the Coral Triangle's international profile, and such efforts should include messages to raise consumer awareness on the unsustainable origins of their purchases. This could simply take the form of including such messages in handouts, presentations, videos etc. made by the Secretariat.

3. Developing a certification scheme for sustainable fisheries through leveraging on CTI's intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder network.

The CTI Executive Secretariat has successfully established strong partnerships with USAID, the Australian Government, WWF, Conservation International, among others. It has also coordinating monitoring and reporting working groups to obtain ecosystem-wide information on the Coral Triangle. This therefore puts the CTI Executive Secretariat and the CTI countries in an advantageous position to leverage on these partnerships and existing functions to develop an accreditation or certification scheme for marine catch production in the region. Such an accreditation is largely undeveloped in this region^x, despite it being a cooking pot for unsustainable fishing practices^{xi}. The Secretariat could choose to adopt existing accreditation systems like the Marine Stewardship Council, or designate a taskforce to consolidate such information and procedures necessary, specific to this region.

Similar to how unsustainable palm oil in Southeast Asia has developed its own international recognition and consumer awareness from the efforts of green groups and certifications like the RSPO, the CTI can leverage on its reach to do the same.

CONCLUSION

Science has shown that climate change will have severe impacts on marine ecosystems, threatening not just biological diversity and human livelihood, but also the ability for such systems to be resilient to changes. As a region troubled with many social and environmental problems, this policy brief has proposed a focused target at the demand-side of unsustainable fishing practices that weakens the resilience of this ecosystem in the face of climate change. It is but one means to address a problem that can affect many.

Appendix A

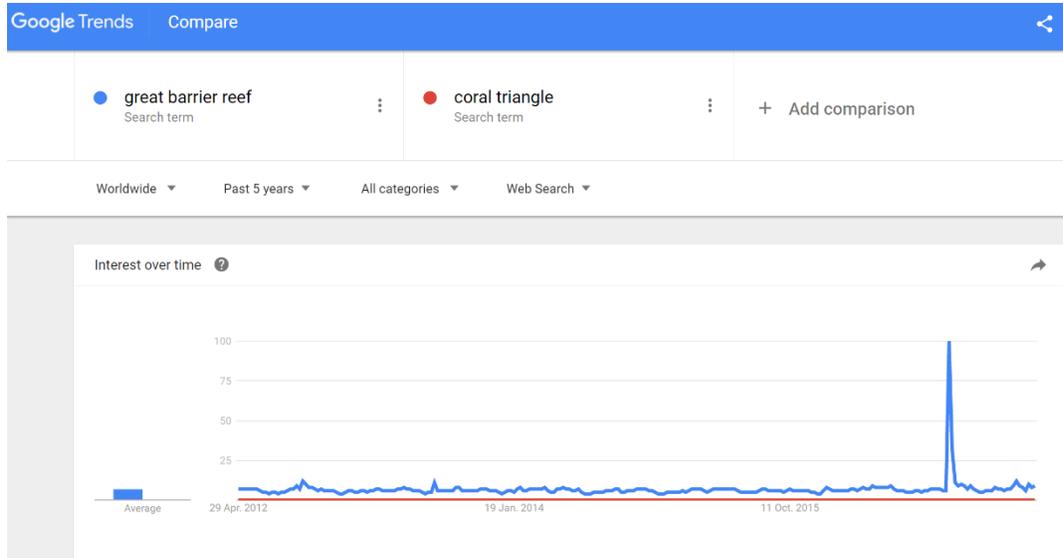


Figure 1 Screenshot taken from Google Trends, 18 April 2017

ⁱ World Wildlife Fund. (n.d.). *Coral Triangle*. Retrieved April 20, 2017, from WWF Global: http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/coraltriangle/

ⁱⁱ FAO. (2016). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2016. Contributing to food security and nutrition for all*. Rome.

ⁱⁱⁱ CTI-CFF Regional Secretariat. (2016). *Annual Activities Report 2015-2016*. Jakarta.

^{iv} World Resources Institute. (2008, September). *Destructive Fishing is Widespread in Southeast Asia*. Retrieved April 19, 2017, from World Resources Institute: <http://www.wri.org/resource/destructive-fishing-widespread-southeast-asia>

^v Pramod, Ganapathiraju, et al. "Estimates of Illegal and Unreported Fish in Seafood Imports to the USA." *Marine Policy* 48 (2014): 102-13. Print.

^{vi} Conniff, R. (2014, April 22). *Unsustainable Seafood: A New Crackdown on Illegal Fishing*. Retrieved from Yale Environment 360: http://e360.yale.edu/features/unsustainable_seafood_a_new_crackdown_on_illegal_fishing

^{vii} FAO. (2016). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2016. Contributing to food security and nutrition for all*. Rome.

^{viii} FAO. (2016). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2016. Contributing to food security and nutrition for all*. Rome.

^{ix} Coral Triangle Initiative. (2013, February 1). Resolution on Sustainable Live Reef Food Fish Trade for the Southeast Asian and CTI-CFF Countries. Retrieved from Coral Triangle Initiative: <http://www.coraltriangleinitiative.org/library/resolution-sustainable-live-reef-food-fish-trade-southeast-asian-and-cti-cff-countries>

^x Marine Stewardship Council. (2017). *Track a Fishery*. Retrieved April 19, 2017, from Marine Stewardship Council: <http://tinyurl.com/mquqegp>

^{xi} World Resources Institute. (2008, September). *Destructive Fishing is Widespread in Southeast Asia*. Retrieved April 19, 2017, from World Resources Institute: <http://www.wri.org/resource/destructive-fishing-widespread-southeast-asia>