

Marine ornamental fish trade in Kerala, India: A demand-supply analysis

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Abstract

The significant revenue involved in marine aquarium trade notwithstanding, in developing countries generates gainful employment and alternate livelihood in rural sector to fishers. Despite rich biodiversity of marine ornamental fishes and ideal milieu for expansion of trade the sector remains at infancy. However, absence of primary database on marketing is a major handicap in expansion and regulation of this sector. This study focused on status of demand, supply and potentials of marine aquarium fish trade. The study covered demand and supply entities including suppliers, hobbyists and aquarium keepers. The results documents prominence of aquarium industry and portray the challenges in expanding domestic trade in Kerala. The preferred candidates in trade in Kerala include damsel fish, wrasse, butterfly fish, trigger fish and cardinal fishes. Hobbyist, awareness, interests and willingness to keep marine fishes was high despite negligible trade. The demand and purchasing power of hobbyists is undoubtedly the single most important force in determining potential and profitability of marine aquarium industry in Kerala. Maintenance and upkeep snags, technological lag, institutional support and high mortality were the major problems in the sector. The resources are currently being unexploited or discarded. The sector could provide alternative avocation for fishermen if state of art technologies for collection, handling and transport are developed integrating with conservation and sustainable development objectives. The marine aquarium trade of Kerala needs to capitalize on key strength of unexploited resources by alleviating major weaknesses of technological lag and harnessing the opportunities of tapping the huge demand for improving trade.