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Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR MAH BOW TAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AT THE OPENING OF ASEAN FISHERIES FEDERATION (AFF) 10TH COUNCIL MEETING & BUSINESS CONFERENCE, THE SINGAPORE SEAFOOD EXHIBITION, AND THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF FISHERIES ASSOCIATIONS (ICFA) ANNUAL MEETING, AND THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE SINGAPORE AGRI-BUSINESS DIRECTORY ON MONDAY, 26 JUNE 2000 AT 10.00 AM AT SUNTEC CITY

Mr Alonso Tan,
Outgoing Chairman, AFF;

Dr Stephen Lee
Incoming Chairman, AFF and Chairman, ICFA

Mr Koh Poh Tiong
Chairman, AVA

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

Fish has always been an important food item, particularly in Asia where fish and rice form the major component of our diet. However, global fisheries production has been declining as fishery resources in the sea are limited and there are signs of over fishing.

2 Fortunately, aquaculture, both on land and in the sea, is showing great potential

for fish production worldwide. According to the FAO, world aquaculture production is

estimated to reach 40 million tonnes by 2010, accounting for about 30% of the total

fish production of about 140 million tonnes, compared to about 23% today.

ASEAN Fisheries

3 In ASEAN, fish is an important source of protein for the region's 500 million

people. In 1996, ASEAN's total fish production was over 13 million tonnes. Notably,

aquaculture accounted for 2.6 million tonnes or 15% of total production.

4 The trade in fish and fishery products is big business. Exports from ASEAN countries totaled US\$ 7.7 billion or 14.7% of world exports in 1996,

while imports were US\$ 2.1 billion. This represents net foreign exchange earnings of over US\$ 5 billion. The fisheries sector is also a major source of employment for some ASEAN countries. In 1996, there were about 1.7 million people involved in full-time fishing activities in ASEAN, with another 3 million people involved in part-time fishing activities.

Singapore's Fisheries and Fish Processing Industry

5 In the case of Singapore, we are a net importer of fish and fishery products. With a per capita consumption of 26.8 kg, Singapore is one of the highest fish-consuming countries in the region. As local fish production, including aquaculture, only meets less than 10% of our fish consumption, we rely heavily on imports, mostly from our ASEAN neighbours. Our trade in fish and fishery products in 1998 was valued at US\$ 1.0 billion.

6 Apart from fresh fish, Singaporeans eat a substantial amount of fish jelly products. We consume 60 tonnes of fishball, fish cake and other fish jelly products a day. AVA and the Seafood Industry Association of Singapore (SIAS) have worked closely to develop the fish processing industry in Singapore. Without this close cooperation between the private and public sectors, it would not have been possible for the industry to have reached its present state of development. The industry has obtained best-practice standards such as ISO 9000 and HACCP certification, which has helped to promote the export of fish and fishery products from Singapore.

Challenges for ASEAN Fisheries

7 Given the importance of fisheries to ASEAN nations, both as a food source and a foreign-exchange earner, the industry's future cannot be left

to chance. It has to be carefully managed. Fisheries, both worldwide and in ASEAN, face many challenges. Environmental concerns, conservation of fisheries resources through sustainable fishing, and aquaculture are some of the looming international issues that need to be addressed as they can have serious environmental and trade implications. I would like to elaborate on 3 pertinent challenges ASEAN nations must face up to ensure the long-term viability of ASEAN fisheries.

8 First, maintaining sustainable fisheries. We must carefully manage our fisheries resources. To over-fish and not allow the resources to regenerate themselves poses a real threat which we cannot afford to ignore. We must therefore balance the size of our catch with the need to ensure that available resources are not harvested beyond their replacement rate.

9 Second, practising environment-friendly aquaculture. Reducing the environmental impact of aquaculture development will promote sustainable aquaculture growth. This is important if the aquaculture industry is to mature into a major fish producer in ASEAN. For example, ASEAN's promotion of mangrove-friendly shrimp farming practices will contribute to sustainable aquaculture growth, and at the same time take care of the environment.

10 And third, reducing post-harvest wastage. More focus on fisheries post-harvest technology is needed to reduce post-harvest loss. It is estimated that globally, about a third of the fish catch is not utilised for

human food consumption because of post-harvest loss resulting from poor handling and preservation. In ASEAN, there is also the problem of under-utilisation of by-catch due to the many species that are caught in fishing nets. There is clearly a need for greater efficiency in the utilisation of fish catches. In this respect, the production in some ASEAN countries of *surimi* or minced fish meat from by-catch, for manufacturing fish jelly products, is encouraging. There is also a need to be more innovative and to produce higher value fishery products to increase the income from fisheries resources.

Higher standards of fish handling and processing can be achieved through the introduction of best practices such as HACCP -- or Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points -- management and ISO 9000 certification.

Future Steps for Fisheries Development in ASEAN

11 Quite obviously, these challenges call for a concerted and determined effort from government agencies in ASEAN and their private sector counterparts. ASEAN governments appreciate the need for close collaboration and cooperation with the private sector. At the national level, ASEAN governments have established a networking relationship with the private sector. And at the regional level, AFF, which represents the fisheries private sectors of member countries, can help to ensure sustainable fisheries development in the region. Indeed, private sector participation is paramount in ensuring that fisheries in the region will be sustainable, environment-friendly and will continue to thrive for the benefit of future generations.

Concluding Remarks

12 Singapore is happy to host the 10th ASEAN Fisheries Federation (AFF) Council Meeting and Business Conference, the Singapore Seafood Exhibition and the Annual Meeting of the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA).

13 I am told that ICFA is having its Annual Meeting in Singapore for the first time in conjunction with AFF and the Singapore Seafood Exhibition. The presence of ICFA members from Japan, USA, Canada, Russia, Australia, New Zealand and the ASEAN countries offers a good opportunity for wider interaction with global players in the seafood trade.

14 My best wishes to all participants for a useful exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences. Most of all, make this opportunity count to help ensure a sustainable future for ASEAN fisheries. Let us work together so that our future generations can continue to enjoy fish as a regular part of their meal.

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15 Finally, I invite our foreign guests to take some time off their busy schedule to enjoy the sights and sounds of Singapore.

16 It now gives me great pleasure to declare open the AFF 10th Council Meeting and Business Conference, the Singapore Seafood Exhibition, the ICFA Annual Meeting, and to launch the Singapore Agri-business Directory.

Thank you.

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