Vision for Cambodia's Fisheries

Cambodia is rich in water resources. Water covers as much as 2.7 percent or 4,870 km2 of the total land area. That increases during the rainy season, when the Tonle Sap water body swells from its dry season area of 3,000 hectares to more than 10,000 hectares during the rainy season. The rivers and inland water systems are rich in essential minerals and nutrition. Further more, Cambodia's geographical location in the tropical area between 10 and 15 degrees North ensures a constant and high level of energy inflow into the ecosystem.

These factors combine to make Cambodia's inland water habitats one of the most productive on earth.

Cambodia's coastal waters are also very productive and rich in fisheries resources. The heavy influx of nutrition from the river systems, which drains into the Gulf of Thailand, enhances the productivity of Cambodia's coastal waters. Local upwelling, bringing nutrition and minerals up towards the surface where solar energy can be absorbed also boosts the productivity. These positive features, combined by intricate coastal current systems around the many small islands, result in Cambodia's coastal area being the most productive coastal waters in the Gulf of Thailand.

Both the inland and coastal water of Cambodia are rich in fisheries resources, contributing an estimated 360,000 ton, valued at some $252 million corresponding to about 8.4 percent of GDP.

It is consequently of no surprise fish and fisheries products constitute one of the most important elements in the diet of the Cambodian people. With a current consumption of about 30 kg per capita per year, fish and fishery products is the most important source of animal protein (more than 75%).

Cambodia's unique habitats and their capacity to support a relatively large fish production represent renewable natural resources of significant value. It is a resource of historic and current importance. Managed properly and used with care and consideration Cambodia's resources has the capacity to provide significant benefits to the present and future generations. The vision for Cambodia's fisheries is consequently:

"A future in which Cambodia and its people are able to enjoy sustainable and economic benefits from the exploitation and farming of living aquatic resources."

What is envisaged is a future in which the Cambodian people have no want for fish and fishery products. A future in which fisheries and aquaculture activities contribute significantly to the social and economic well-being of the people, in particular rural communities where fisheries is as much a way of life as it is a source of nutrition and income.

New ways of managing fisheries and distributing the rights and obligations associated with the harvesting of fish and the use of aquatic habitats is necessary for such a vision to become a reality. Increased supplies of fish and fisheries products are also necessary to keep pace with increasing demands for both domestic and export markets. The Cambodian population is increasing, this, coupled with gradually increasing incomes exerts demand pressure for better quality fisheries products. Also economic growth in neighboring countries and the region increases demands for fish and fishery products. That represents export and foreign exchange earning
possibilities Cambodia can become well positioned to utilize. Export demands represent both a
collective and an opportunity. It can siphon much needed supplies of the domestic supply. It can,
however, also be used as an engine for growth to sustain a substantially increased aquaculture
based fishing industry.

Utilizing opportunities and meeting challenges require a strong and competitive industry, dominated
by private sector entrepreneurship. Such an industry is only at its infancy at present. The potentials
are there. What is envisaged is the private sector gradually develops an aquaculture and farming
fisheries based industry that uses Cambodia's natural comparative advantages to establish itself as a
highly competitive and profitable industry. Initial steps are already being made in subsistence areas
of aquaculture. An infusion of technology, investment capital and entrepreneurship to
appropriately benefit from the natural opportunities of Cambodia is required.

Sustainable social and economic benefits from fisheries and aquaculture are intrinsically interlinked
with the soundness and integrity of critical habitats. A major element of the future vision for
Cambodia's fisheries is the restoration and maintenance of healthy and sound habitats. All fisheries
and aquaculture activities will consequently be undertaken with due regard and consideration for
fragile ecosystems and habitats. Then and only then will the current generations be able to use
Cambodia's natural resources, without compromising the choice and options available to future
generations. Current generations shape the future where the Cambodian people will benefit from
fisheries.

This is a significant responsibility. The nutritional, social and economic well being of our children
and their children depend on our current actions and the heritage we leave behind to future
generations. We are responsible for ensuring we pass on a healthy environment and the necessary
biodiversity for future generations to maintain the productive capacity of Cambodia's aquatic
habitats. That requires sound management and administration of our environment and living aquatic
resources.

A "world-view" where the obvious need for long-term sustainability, social and economic benefits -
replaces short-term needs and expedience is required. Such a shift in paradigm is possible, but it will
take time and require focused effort to bring about the necessary change in attitude and approach to
fisheries management.

The Strategic Framework

The Department of Fisheries (DOF), under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
(MAFF) is the custodian of Cambodia's living aquatic resources. The department holds responsibility
for managing and administrating Cambodia's fisheries and aquaculture, and it is responsible for
ensuring Cambodia and its people can continue enjoying benefits from our aquatic resources.

However, DOF is not alone. It executes its mandate in close consultation with other agencies of
government and the general public. But the fact remain, DOF is responsible for managing and
administrating Cambodia's living aquatic resources.

Its important role is summarized as follows:

"DOF is custodian for Cambodia's living aquatic resources for the benefit of the nation and its people
through scientific management and conservation of aquatic resources and their habitats."

It then falls within DOF's purview to formulate and implement the policies and strategies necessary
to ensure the vision for fisheries and aquaculture is realized. This has been done reactively in the
past. DOF responding to urgent needs and calls for intervention to address issues as and when they
arise. That was properly adequate in a centrally managed and con-trolled economic system, in times of unrest and uncertainty. But it is widely recognized as being inadequate for DOF to effectively deal with future challenges. A "pro-active" approach to fisheries and resources management is required.

DOF is responding effectively to these formidable challenges. In doing so, DOF is adopting a system of long-term planning, monitoring and evaluation to strengthen its capabilities to carry out its mandate

**Strategic Goals and Objectives**
The strategic goals that are being adopted to guide fisheries sector development includes:

1. All living aquatic resources should be harvested within their sustainable limits by 2010.

2. Governance systems and procedures that allocate resources use rights and obligations through democratic means and community participation are in place and fully operational by 2010.

3. The supply of fishery products will keep pace with increasing demands to safeguard the nutritional standards, and the social and economic well being of communities depending on fisheries for their livelihood,

4. Effective and adequate support is provided to help private sector development and expansion in fisheries, in particular aquaculture where Cambodia has significant comparative advantages, and

5. Critical habitats used for fisheries and aquaculture is safeguarded.

DOF will be pursuing these goals over the following decade. Monitoring and evaluation of progress towards realizing the goals and their corresponding objectives provides DOF with the management tool needed to ensure success.

**Specific Objectives**
The specific objectives, related to each goal are outlined below.

**Goal 1:**
"Ensuring all living aquatic resources should be harvested within their sustainable limits by 2010".

Accomplishing Goal 1, require the following objectives are realized:

- The extraction of living aquatic resources follows what is safe and prudent under precautionary principles for the management and administration of living aquatic resources.

- A scientific base to support the management and administration of Cambodia's living aquatic resources is established and operational; and

- The authorities in close collaboration with local communities carry out monitoring and enforcement.

**Goal 2:**
"Establishing governance systems and procedures that allocate resources use rights and obligations through democratic means and community participation are in place and fully operational by 2010", 
Realizing Goal 2, require realization of the following objectives:

- Local communities carry out the allocation of resources use-rights and use-obligations at local levels
- Regional fisheries councils (community based) adopt revolving management plans for all fisheries and aquatic resource usages
- Long term (five year) revolving fisheries management plans are prepared and adopted to guide the use of living aquatic resources and their habitats
- Scientific information, statistics, stock assessments, social and economic information forms the basis for the preparation and implementation of management plans; and
- The fisheries service plays a supportive role to local communities and the local administrations in establishing and implementing community based fisheries management systems and procedures.

Goal 3:

"Ensuring the supply of fish and fishery products will keep pace with increasing demands to safeguard the nutritional standards, and the social and economic well-being of communities depending on fisheries for their livelihood".

Realization of Goal 3, is dependent on realization of the following operational objectives

- Fish production from capture fisheries, both inland and marine fisheries, is reduced to conform to the sustainable capacity of the aquatic resources and habitats;
- The production of fish and other aquatic resources from aquaculture and farming fisheries is increased to compensate for the anticipated reduction from capture fisheries and increasing demands; and
- Market forces drive fisheries sector development and private sector investments in fisheries and aquaculture, including production, trade, processing and marketing.

Goal 4:

"Providing effective and adequate support is provided to help private sector development and expansion in fisheries, in particular aquaculture where Cambodia has significant comparative advantages."

Goal 4, require realization of the following objectives

- All necessary technical support to support private sector fisheries and aquaculture development is available from DOF and it supportive agencies;
- Institutional financing is available to support private sector development with working capital and investment credits;
- A favorable business environment that is conducive to private sector investment and development prevail; and
- Special measures and projects will be initiated to support poverty alleviation and alternative (to capture fisheries) employment opportunities in aquaculture and farming fisheries sub-sectors.
Goal 5:
"Ensuring critical habitats used for fisheries and aquaculture is safe-guarded."

Realization of Goal 5, necessitates

- All fishing and aquaculture activities are carried out in a manner that conforms with sound environmental and ecological principles;

- Local parameters for environmental management is established and adhered to; and

- Local communities under the guidance and support of the fishery service, carry out local monitoring and evaluation of compliance with sound environmental principles.

Pursuing and realizing the above goals and objectives necessitates a strong foundation for DOF operations. Such a foundation is not in place at present.

Foundation for Fisheries Development
Establishing the necessary institutional capacity and capability -foundation -is an integrated part of the work, which will be carried out during the coming decade. A strong foundation for the fisheries sector include:

- A new fisheries law that is substantially revised to conform to the basic goals and objectives envisaged for the fisheries sector. (The current fisheries law is under review and redrafting at present).

- A fisheries service that is adequately staffed and supported by the physical and financial means to effectively carry out its mandate of being custodian for Cambodia's fisheries resources in an administrative system of co-management together with the local communities and other agencies of government.

- The capability to provide scientific support to effectively manage Cambodia's natural fisheries and aquatic resources in accordance with sound biological, ecological, social and economic principles.

- Improvements to internal management systems and procedures, including the establishment of cross-ministerial systems for managing Cambodia's natural resources in general and fisheries in particular.

- Realizing the envisaged fisheries future will require substantial resources over the coming decade. The Government does not have the necessary resources and is therefore dependent on a considerable support from multilateral and bilateral aid agencies. Your support is welcome.